DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA (VOLUME II)

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DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA

BY
WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA

CHAPTER I.

A VISITOR.

Black night lay over sea and land; there was a low continuous murmur round the rocks and shores; and out here, at the end of the little wooden quay, two men were slowly pacing up and down in the dark. They were the serious-visaged Coinneach Breac and his taller and younger companion Calum-a-Bhata. The whereabouts of the village, across the bay, was revealed by a solitary light in one of the windows: no doubt the man who looked after the pier was enjoying the comfort of his own home as long as was possible, before coming down to make ready for the expected steamer.

The influence of the hour was upon Coinneach.

"I will tell you this, Calum," he was saying, in his native tongue—and speaking in rather a low tone, as if he did not wish to be overheard—"that there are many strange things happen to them that have to watch through the night; and they are never mentioned; for it is not safe to mention them. You do not know who may hear—perhaps some one at the back of your shoulder. And the speaking of such things is harmful. When I was telling you, Calum, about the Woman and her overtaking me as I was on the way home from Ru Gobhar, well, it all came over me again, and it was as if someone had me by the throat again, and I could not move, no, nor say some good words to get free from her and escape. But I will tell you of another strange thing now, that did not happen to me, so that I can talk of it, and without danger to anyone. It happened to my uncle, Angus Roy, that used to be out at Ardavore Lighthouse. Ah, well, now, if they would only speak, it is the lighthouse-men that could be telling you of strange things—ay, like the ringing of the fog-bell on clear nights, and the men looking at each other. Well, now, about my uncle, Calum; you know the men at the lighthouse have little occupation or amusement when they are not attending to the lamps; and sometimes, when it was getting dark, my uncle would go away down the iron ladder on to the rocks, and he would have a rod and a stout line and a big white fly, and he would go to where the water was deep, and maybe he would get a lythe or two for his supper. Well, one night, he came up the ladder, and when he came in he was nearly falling down on the floor, and he was all trembling, and his face was white. 'Duncan,' says he, 'I have been bitten by a dog.' 'You are dreaming, Angus,' said the other, 'for how could there be a dog on the Ardavore rocks?' 'See that,' says my uncle, and he was holding out his hand. And there, sure enough, was the mark of the dog's teeth. 'It was trying to pull me into the water,' says he, 'and when I escaped from it, it followed me, and when I got up the

ladder, I looked down, and there it was, with its fore-paws on the first rung, and its eyes glaring on me. God help us all this night, Duncan,'—that is what my uncle was saying, 'if there is a dog on the island.' Now you know, Calum, there is no whisky or brandy allowed in the lighthouses, except for medicine; and Duncan MacEachran, he was the captain of the lighthouse, and he went to the chest and got a glass of brandy for my uncle, and says he, 'Drink that, Angus, and do not think any more of the dog, and in the morning we will search for the dog'—and so that was all for that night. Then the next day they searched and searched, and there was not any sign of a dog; for how could a dog get out to Ardavore, that is fourteen miles from the mainland? And another thing I must tell you, Calum, is that the marks of the dog's teeth on my uncle's hand they were almost away the next morning, and white. Very well. Duncan would think no more of it; and my uncle would think no more of it; and the marks would go away altogether. But now I will tell you what happened, and you will see whether it would not make a strong man afraid. As the evening came on, my uncle he was getting more and more uneasy; and he was looking at his hand; and the marks were becoming red now, instead of white. My uncle he could not sit still; and he could not do his work; what he said was, 'Duncan, it is the dog coming for me, to drag me into the water.' Then says Duncan, 'How can he come for you? How can he climb up the ladder? But when it is the same hour that you were down on the rocks last night, then I will look out and see what I can see.' And he did that. He opened the door, and looked down; and there was the dog, with its fore-paws on the first rung of the ladder, and its eyes glaring up. I can tell you, Calum, he did not wait long; he was himself like to fall down with fright; and when he got the door closed again, he put in all the iron stanchions as quickly as he could. And then he went and sate down. My uncle he was a little better by this time. 'The dog has gone away now,' says he. 'I know it. But to-morrow night it will be back—and the next night—and the next night—until it drags me into the water. What is the use of fighting against it, Duncan? I might as well go down, and be drowned now; for the dog is coming back for me.' But Duncan would not say that. He said 'I will contrive something. Perhaps it is not only drowning that is meant. And a man must not give up his life.' And Duncan MacEachran was right there, Calum," continued Coinneach, in an absent kind of way, "for you know what the proverb says—'*There may be hopes of a person at sea, but none of one in the grave.*' Very well, then, the next day he went into the store-room and he searched about till he found a trap they had brought out to see if they could get an otter; and during the afternoon he took down the trap to the rocks, and he was placing it at the foot of the ladder, and concealing the most of it with seaweed. But do you know what he put into the trap, Calum? No, you do not know; and if you were guessing for a hundred years, you would not guess. He put a New Testament—ay, that is what

he was putting into the trap—a New Testament with a dark cover, in among the seaweed. 'Because,' says he, 'if he sets his foot in the trap, then he will be caught, and we will see what kind of a dog he is; but if he is a kind of dog that cannot be caught in a trap, then the New Testament will burn his foot for him, and we will hear of him no more.' That is what he was saying to my uncle. Then the evening came, and my uncle he got worse. He could not sit still; and he could not do his work. The marks on his hand were red again; and he knew that the dog was coming. Duncan MacEachran, perhaps he was frightened; but he would not say he was frightened; all that day, my uncle was telling me, Duncan was hardly speaking a word. My uncle he was sitting in the chair, and looking at his hand, and moaning; and the redder and redder grew the marks; and at last he got up, and says he, 'Duncan,' says he, 'something has come over me; something is drawing me; will you open the door, for I have no strength to open the door?' His teeth were chattering, as he was telling me long after, and himself shaking, and sweat on his forehead. 'No, by God, Angus,' says Duncan, 'I will not open the door this night—nor you either—and if you come near the door, it will be a fight between you and me.' 'I am not wishing for any fight,' says my uncle, 'but there is something in my head—and I would like to look down the ladder—to see what is at the foot of the ladder.' 'Be still, for a foolish man!' says Duncan. 'Would you fall and smash yourself on the rocks?' Well, the time was come. My uncle's teeth were chattering; but he did not speak now; he was sitting and moaning, for he knew the beast had put something over him, and was coming now to claim him. And then they were listening; and as they were listening there was a terrible clap of thunder, and another, and another—three there were—and then silence. My uncle was telling me he did not speak; and Duncan looked at him. They waited a while. And then my uncle rose, and says he, 'Duncan, the beast has gone away. Do you see the marks?—they are white now.' And perhaps, Calum, you would have opened the door and gone down the iron ladder to see what had happened at the foot of the ladder—although it was dark—and the dog might still be there; but let me tell you this, that if you had been living in a lighthouse, you would not have gone down; for the men who live in the lighthouses they think of many things. It was not till the next morning that they went down the ladder; and do you know what was there?—the otter-trap was closed together, and yet there was nothing in it. Do you see that, now—that the trap had closed together and caught nothing; but I am thinking that the beast, whatever kind of beast it was, had got a fine burn on his foot when he touched the New Testament. I am thinking that. And the marks on my uncle's hand, they went away almost directly; and the dog was never heard of again: I tell you, Calum, I tell you it was a clever thing of Duncan MacEachran to put the otter-trap and the New Testament at the foot of the ladder. But those men at the lighthouses, they come upon strange things, and

they will not always speak of them, because it is safer not to speak of them."

"I am glad I am not at a lighthouse," said Calum, slowly; and thereafter for some little time the two men walked up and down in silence.

The dim red light in the distant cottage went out; and presently another and stronger appeared—moving along by the side of the shore. They watched its course as it drew nearer and nearer; then in the silence of the night they could make out footsteps; finally, with a slow tramp along the wooden structure, the pier-keeper came up—and greatly surprised was he to find the two men there.

"Well, it was this weh, Thomas," said Coinneach, in English, "Calum and me we were thinking it was as easy waiting here for the steamer as on board the yat, and less trouble in pulling ashore in a hurry. And the steamer, will she be late now, do you think?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the pier-keeper, as he proceeded to sling up the big lantern he carried, "for there has been heavy weather in the south. And you might have been sleeping in your beds for some while to come."

Coinneach did not like this reproach.

"Then perhaps you are not knowing what it is to have a good master," said he, "or perhaps you are your own master, which is better. But listen to what I am telling you now: if my master wishes to have things put on board, or brought ashore from the steamer, then it's me that is willing to wait up half the night, or ahl the night, to be sure to catch the steamer; for I know he will seh when I go out to the yat again, 'Coinneach, go below now, and have a sleep.' That is when you have a good master; but if you had a bad master, would you be for walking up and down a dark pier through the night? It's me that would see him going to the tuffle first!"

"Can you give me a fill of a pipe, Coinneach?" asked the pier-keeper; and then he added, facetiously: "for they say there's always plenty of tobacco at Eilean Heimra."

"Ay, are they sehing that?" answered Coinneach, as he drew out a piece of tobacco from his waistcoat pocket. "And mebbe they'd better not be sehing that to me, or they'll have to swallow their words—*and the bulk of my fist as well!*"

The three men sate and talked together, and smoked; and as the time went by, a faint, half-bluish light began to appear over the low-lying hills in the east; the cottages across the water became visible; there were gulls flying about. The dawn broadened up and declared itself; something of a warmer hue prevailed; a solitary thin thread of smoke began to ascend from one of the chimneys. The pier-master lowered his lantern and extinguished it. And yet there was no sign of the coming steamer—no far-off hoarse signal startling the silence of the new-born day.

Then, as the morning wore on, and the sleeping village awoke to life, Coin-

neach said:—

"I think we will pull out to the yat, Calum, to see if the master will be for coming ashore; and if we should hear the steamer we can turn back."

"Very well, then, Coinneach," said the younger man, "for sure I am the master will be wanting to come ashore to meet the steamer."

And away they went to the boat. But indeed all Lochgarra was astir this morning; for it was not often the villagers had a chance of seeing the steamer come in by daylight; and in any case it was a rare visitor—once in three weeks at this time of the year. So that the long-protracted booming of the steam-pipe brought even the old women out to the doors; and by the time the two red funnels were sighted coming round the distant headland, quite a small crowd of people had come down to the quay.

And here were the two ladies from Lochgarra House, hastening along to be in time: why should they not also join in the general excitement? But just as they arrived at the pier Mary Stanley suddenly stopped short: the very first person she had caught sight of—among that straggling assemblage—was the young laird of Heimra Island.

"Mary, you are not afraid of him!" said Käthchen.

It was but a momentary irresolution, of which she was instantly ashamed; she continued on her way; nay, she went boldly up to him, and past him, and said "Good morning!" as she went by.

"Good morning!" said he—and he raised his cap: that was all.

Then, after a second of vacillation and embarrassment, Mary turned—he was barely a couple of yards distant.

"Mr. Ross," said she, "I suppose you—you heard of what happened at Ru-Minard."

"Yes, I am sorry you should have been troubled," he said, in a formal kind of way.

"But they have built up the huts again!" she exclaimed. "And I suppose the people here will go back and burn them down, and there will be riot after riot—never ending!"

He did not answer her: indeed, there was no question to answer. And Käthchen, standing a little bit apart, was watching these two with the keenest interest; and she was saying to herself—"Well, she has met her match at last. She has been all-conquering hitherto; every man who has come near her has been all complaisance and humility and gratitude for a smile or a friendly look; but this one—this one is as proud as herself! And what will she do?—become angry and indignant, and astonish my young Lord Arrogance? Or become humbly submissive, and beg for a little favour and consideration?—and Mary Stanley, of all people!"

Mary regarded the young man, and seeing that he did not speak, she said—

"A never-ending series of riots, is that what it is coming to? And if not, what is to be done? What am I to do?"

He answered her very respectfully—and very coldly:

"I think you should hardly ask me, Miss Stanley. If you consider, you will see that I could not well interfere—even so far as to offer advice. You will find Mr. Purdie will know how to deal with such a case."

"Mr. Purdie!" she said. "I cannot have Mr. Purdie here the whole year round. Surely I can do something myself? Cannot you tell me what to do?"

He hesitated. But here was a very beautiful young woman, appealing to him, and apparently in distress.

"Well," said he, at length, "I am not quite sure, but I fancy if you wish to have those men removed, you would have to take proceedings under the Vagrant Act. I am not quite sure; I fancy that is so. But then, if you do that, you will be denounced by the Highland Land League, and by plenty of the newspapers—natural enough on the part of the newspapers, for they would know nothing of the circumstances."

Käthchen thought that the outlaw and savage (as he had been described to her) talked very reasonably and intelligently; but Mary Stanley was quite as much perplexed as before.

"I don't want to bring the law to bear on anybody," she said. "I don't want to injure anybody. Surely there are other ways. If I go to those men, and show them they have no right to be there, and pay them for the lobster-traps that were burned, and give them each a sum of money, surely they would go away home to their own island?" And then she added (for she wasn't a fool), "Or might not that merely induce a lot more to come in their place?"

"I am afraid it would," said he.

But by this time the big steamer was slowing in to the pier.

"Miss Stanley," said young Ross, "would you mind coming this way a little—to be out of the reach of the rope?"

She politely thanked him, and moved her position; then he left her, making his way through the people; and the next she saw of him was that he was on the bridge, talking to the captain.

There was a good deal of cargo—barrels, bales, and what not—to be landed; but only one passenger came ashore, a white-haired little woman, whose luggage consisted of an American-looking trunk and also the head and enormous horns of a Wapiti deer, the head swathed in canvas. The little dame was of a most pleasant appearance, with her silvery hair, her bright eyes, and a complexion unusually fresh and clear for one of her age; and she was smartly and neatly dressed, too; but when once she had come along the gangway, and passed through the crowd,

hardly any further notice was taken of her, all attention being concentrated on what was going forward on board the steamer. The poor old woman seemed bewildered—and agitated; her hands were trembling; she was staring back in a curious way at the vessel she had just left. Mary (of course) went up to her.

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" she said, in her gentle way.

And then perhaps she would rather have drawn back; for she found that the old dame's eyes were overflowing with tears.

"That—is the young master?" the old woman asked, in tones of eager and yet subdued excitement—and she was still staring at the two figures on the bridge.

"That is Mr. Ross of Heimra," Mary said, "who is talking to the captain."

The silver-haired old dame clasped her trembling hands together.

"Dear, dear me!" she said—and there were tears trickling down her face—"the fine gentleman he has grown! And we were all saying that long ago—we were all saying that—but who could have told?—so fine and handsome he has grown up as a man!—Ay, ay, I made sure it was young Donald himself, when he came on board, but he was not looking my way——"

"Would you like to speak to Mr. Ross?" said Mary, in the same gentle fashion.

Then the little white-haired old woman turned to this tall and beautiful young creature who was addressing her; and a curious, wondering, and glad light shone through her tears.

"You, mem," said she, timidly—"perhaps you are his good lady, mem?"

Mary's face flushed.

"I hardly know Mr. Ross," said she coldly. "But if you wish to see him, I will fetch him—or send for him—"

"Mem," said the old dame, piteously, and the tears were now running freely down her face, "I have come all the way from Canada, just—just to have one look at young Donald—that—that was the lamb of my heart! My two boys, mem, they were thinking I should go and pay a visit to their uncle, who is in Sacramento; and they are very good boys: one of them—one of them would have gone as far with me as Detroit, and put me safe there on the line; but—but I said to them, if there is so much money to be spent, and if your old mother can go travelling anywhere, well, then, it is just away back to Lochgarra I am going, to see the young master once again before I die. But no, mem," she said, somewhat anxiously, "I do not wish to speak to him, in case he is not remembering me. I will wait a little. Maybe he will be remembering me, and maybe not—it is sixteen years since I left this place—and he was just ten, then—but such a young gentleman as you never saw, mem!—and the love of every one! And I will just wait and see, mem—perhaps he is not remembering me at all—but that is no matter—I will go back to my boys and tell them I saw the young master, and him grown to be such a fine gentleman—it

is all I was coming here for—ay, and I knew it was young Donald the moment I saw him—but—but maybe he is not remembering me—–"

"Oh, but indeed you must speak to him!" said Mary. "I will go and fetch him myself."

For at this moment the steamer was making preparations to be off again—there being little traffic at Lochgarra. The bell was rung, but merely as a matter of form; there was no passenger going on board. Donald Ross bade good-bye to the captain, and stepped ashore. The gangway was withdrawn. Then the captain signalled down to the engine-room; the blades of the screw began to churn up the clear green water into seething foam; and the great steamer was slowly moving out to sea again.

"Mr. Ross," said Mary (and he turned round in quick surprise) "there is some one here who wishes to speak to you."

He looked towards the old dame who was standing there in piteous expectancy—went up to her—and, after a moment of scrutiny and hesitation, said—

"Why, surely you are Ann!"

The sudden shock of joy was almost too much for her; she could not speak; she clung to the hand he had frankly offered her, and held it between her trembling palms; she was laughing and crying at the same time—great tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Well, well," said he, with a very friendly and pleasant smile lighting up his face, "you have come a long way. And are you going to live in the old place now—and leave the farm to your sons? They must be great big fellows by this time, I suppose. And that—what is that you have brought with you? You don't have beasts like that coming about the house at night, do you?"

She tried to speak; but it was only in detached and incoherent sentences—and there was a bewilderment of gladness in the shining eyes with which she gazed on him.

"I was feared, sir, you might not be remembering me—and—and you have not forgotten Ann, after all these years—oh, yes, yes, a long way—and every night I was saying 'Will the young master be remembering Ann?' And the deer's head, sir?—oh, no, there are no deer at all in our part of the country—but—but it was my boy Andrew, he had to go down to Toronto, and he saw the head, and he brought it back, and says he, 'Mother, if you are going away back to Lochgarra, take this head with you, and tell the young master it is a present from the whole of us, and maybe he will hang it up in the hall.'"

"We have no hall to hang it up in now," said he, but quite good-naturedly—for Mary Stanley was standing by, not unnaturally interested. "However, you must come out and see where I am living now—at Heimra Island. You remember

Martha?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said the old dame, who had dried her tears now, and was looking most delighted and proud and happy.

"But you have not told me yet what has brought you all the way back to Lochgarra," said he.

She seemed astonished—and even disappointed.

"You cannot tell that, sir? Well, it was just to see yourself—nothing else but that—it was just to see young Donald, that I used to call the lamb of my heart. But that was when you were very young, sir."

Donald Ross laughed.

"Come away, Ann," said he, and he put his hand affectionately on the old dame's shoulder. "You must come out to Heimra Island, and Martha will look after you, after all your travelling. Now let me see; we shan't be getting up anchor for an hour or an hour and a half; but I shall have your things put on board, and in the meanwhile you can go round to the inn and wait for me there. Tell them to give you a room with a good fire in it. And, by the way, you don't want me to call you by your married name, do you?—for to tell you the truth, I don't remember it!"

"Oh, no, no, no, sir!" said the trim little old lady, who could not take her glad, and wondering, and admiring eyes off 'the young master.' "I'm just Ann, if you please, sir—just Ann, as I used to be."

Young Ross turned to call up Coinneach and Calum, who were waiting at the end of the quay, in order to give them instructions about the luggage; and it was at this moment that Mary stepped up to the stranger.

"Instead of going to wait at the inn," said she, "wouldn't you rather come with me? Lochgarra House is quite as near—and you would not be sitting alone."

It was a gentle face that was regarding her, and a gentle voice that spoke.

"Oh, yes, mem, if you will be so kind," was the answer.

"Then tell Mr. Ross you have gone on with me; and he can send one of the men for you when he is ready," Mary said; and by this little arrangement she was saved the necessity of having any further conversation with young Ross of Heimra, if such was her intention.

They moved away.

"Do you think you will know many of the people about here, after so long a time?" asked Mary of her new acquaintance, as they left the quay—the silent, but not unobservant, nor yet unamused, Käthchen accompanying.

"Oh, no, mem," was the answer (but, as she talked, the old woman turned from time to time to see if she could not get some brief further glimpse of her heart's idol) "my people they were all about Dingwall; and it was from Dingwall I came over here to serve with Mrs. Ross. Ah, she was the noble lady, that!"

continued the faithful Ann, looking back over many years. "When we heard of her death, it was then, more than ever, that I thought I must go away to Lochgarra, to see the young master. For she was so careful of his upbringing; and they were just constant companions; and he was always the little gentleman, and polite to everyone—except when Mrs. Ross had a headache—and then he would come down stairs, ay, into the servants' hall, or even to the door of the kitchen—and proud and fierce, as if he would kill some one, and he would say 'What is this noise? I order you to be quiet, when my mamma is asleep!' And you would have heard a pin drop after that, mem. Rather too fond of books he was," continued the silver-haired old dame, whose newly-found happiness had made her excitedly talkative, "and rather delicate in health; and then Mrs. Ross would be talking to him in different languages, neither the Gaelic nor the English, and he would be answering her as well as he could—the little gentleman!—when they were sitting at the table. Indeed, now, that was making the old Admiral—that was Mrs. Ross's uncle—very angry; and he was swearing, and saying there was no use for any language but the English language; and many's and many's the time he was taking young Donald away with him in his yacht, and saying he would make a sailor and a man of him. Well, well, now, who would think the young master had ever been delicate like that, and fond of books—so fine and handsome he has grown—and the laugh he has—ay, a laugh that carries a good story of health and happiness with it!"

"No, he does not look as if he had ever been very delicate," said Mary, absently. "Perhaps the rough life out there on that island was the very best thing for him."

When they got to the house, Mary escorted her guest up to the drawing-room in the tower, and was most assiduous in her pretty little attentions, and had wine and biscuits brought in, for Mrs. Armour (as the old woman's name turned out to be) had breakfasted early on board the steamer. And Mrs. Armour repaid these kindnesses by eagerly talking about young Donald and nothing else; she seemed to think that the two young ladies were as interested as herself in that wonderful subject; and here was the very house in which she had lived to suggest innumerable reminiscences. She did not say anything about Miss Stanley's occupation of the house; nor did she ask how it came about that Donald Ross was now living on the island they could see from this room: no doubt she had heard something, in her remote Canadian home, of the misfortunes that had befallen the old family. But even while she talked her eyes would go wandering to the window that commanded a view of the village; it was like a girl of eighteen watching for her first sweetheart: she was talking to these very kind ladies—but it was young Donald of Heimra that her heart was thinking of all the time.

Then the welcome summons came, and away she went with Coinneach

Breac. The two girls watched them go along to the boat in which 'the young master' was waiting; then the men took to the oars, and made for the yacht. The mainsail and jib of the *Sirène* had already been hoisted; very soon the anchor was got up; and with a light southerly breeze favouring them they had set out for the solitary island that was now Donald Ross's home.

"Well, Mamie," said Käthchen, who was still standing at the window and looking at the gradually receding yacht, "that is a very strange young man. I have been a spectator this morning; and I have been interested. I have seen a young man approached by a beautiful young woman—a damsel in distress, you might almost say—who condescends to appeal to him; and in return he is barely civil—oh, yes, let us say civil—and even polite, but in a curiously stand-off manner. And then an old Highland servant appears; and behold! his face lights up with pleasure; and he is as kind as kind can be, and affectionate; he puts his hand on her shoulder as if she were some old school-mate, and nothing will do but that she must go away out to see his home. To tell you the truth, I did not think he had so much human nature in him. I thought living in that lonely island would have made him a misanthrope. But I shall never forget the expression of his face when he recognised the old woman that had been his mother's servant."

Mary Stanley was silent for a little while; then she said—

"It is a wonderful thing, the affection and devotion that could bring an old woman like that all the way across the Atlantic for a glimpse of one she had known only as a child. And it seems to be a thing you cannot purchase with money, nor yet with good intentions, nor by anything you can do, however hard you may try." She turned away from the window. "But—but I haven't given up yet, Käthchen."

"You never will give up, Mamie," said her friend; and then she added complacently: "For you don't know how."

CHAPTER II.

A DEFORCEMENT.

But wonders will never cease. It was a couple of days after these occurrences, and Mary Stanley and Kate Glendinning were just about to sit down to lunch, when the Highland maid Barbara came into the room, with a curious expression on her face. And it was in almost awe-stricken tones that she spoke:

"It's Mr. Ross, mem," said she—her pretty, soft, shy eyes now full of a vague astonishment.

"Mr. Ross?—Mr. Ross of Heimra? Well, what about him?" Mary demanded, little guessing at the true state of affairs.

"He's in the hall, mem," said the startled Barbara. "He says would Miss Stanley speak with him for a moment, and he would not keep you more than a moment, mem."

The blood rushed to Mary's forehead, and for a second she was embarrassed and speechless; then, with a certain impatience of her own confusion, she said—

"Well, ask Mr. Ross to go into the drawing-room, Barbara—and tell him I will be there directly."

She turned quickly to her friend. "Käthchen, would you mind going and speaking to him?—I shall be down in a minute."

Possibly Käthchen did not quite like this commission; but then she was in the habit of reflecting that as a salaried companion she had duties to perform; and so with much good nature she went away into the drawing-room, to receive this unexpected visitor. It was some minutes before Mary reappeared. The male eye could not have detected any difference between the Mary Stanley of the dining-room and the Mary Stanley of the drawing-room; but Käthchen instantly perceived the minute alteration. Mary had whipped off to her room to exchange the stiff linen collar that she wore for a piece of soft frilling—a more feminine adornment. Moreover, she came into the room, not radiant in her beauty and self-possessed as was her wont, but with a kind of timid, modest, almost shamefaced gratitude for this act of neighbourliness, and in her clear eyes a manifest pleasure shone. Käthchen, now relieved of her duties, and become a mere onlooker, said to herself: "I don't know what Mamie means; but that young man had better take care."

He, on his side, certainly showed no lack of self-possession—though he still remained standing, his yachting cap in his hand.

"I hope I am not inconveniencing you," said he to Miss Stanley. "The fact is, we got becalmed just outside the bay——"

"But won't you be seated?" said she, and she herself took a chair. Käthchen retired to one of the windows—not to look out, however.

"First of all, I wish to thank you for your kindness to Mrs. Armour," said he. "She is very grateful to you; for of course it was pleasant to the old dame to have a friendly hand held out to her, when she was rather frightened she might be coming back among strangers."

"Oh, that is nothing," said Mary; and then she was emboldened to add, "The wonderful thing was to find anyone connected with this place who would accept

of any civility. But then she has been away a long time."

If this was a taunt, unintentional or otherwise, he took no heed of it.

"What I really wished to see you about, however, was this," he went on. "It was only last night that I heard of the sheriff's judgment in the case of James Macdonald—James Macdonald, the crofter, at Cruagan——"

"I know him," said Mary. "But what case? I never heard of it!"

"An action brought by Mr. Purdie on your behalf," he answered briefly.

"Why was I not told of this?" she said.

"The proceedings began some little time ago," he said. "And, indeed, Miss Stanley, I must apologise to you for seeming to interfere. I do not wish to interfere in any way whatever; it would be most impertinent on my part; and besides—besides, I have no desire to interfere. But in this particular case I think you should know what is going on, for Macdonald is a determined man; and if the sheriff's officer and his concurrents come out this afternoon by the mail-car, as they are likely to do, I'm afraid there will be trouble. The sheriff has granted a decree of removal; but I don't think Macdonald will go; while it is just possible the other crofters may back him up. I thought if you would go along and ask the sheriff's officer to stay proceedings until Macdonald could be talked to by his own friends——"

"Well, of course I will!" said she, instantly. "But I want to know what this action is all about! It seems to me that I ought to be consulted before Mr. Purdie takes to evicting any of the tenants."

There was a curious, covert gleam of satisfaction in the young man's lustrous black eyes; but he went on to say very quietly—

"I am afraid Macdonald has put himself entirely in the wrong. For one thing, he is over two years in arrear with his rent; and that of itself, according to the Crofters Holding Act, forfeits his tenancy. And then, again, he refuses to pay because of reasons that won't hold water. He claims compensation for improvements——"

"Why not?" said she—promptly taking the side of the tenant, and talking to young Ross as if he were advocating the landlord's interest.

"Well," said Young Donald, "he has cut a few drains and covered them in; but the sheriff found that this was counterbalanced by his neglect of other parts of the croft, and that there was no just claim. His other reason for refusal was that he wanted an allowance made to him for Mr. Watson's sheep being permitted to graze over the Cruagan crofts after the crops were reaped."

"And why not?" said Mary again. "Why should Mr. Watson's sheep graze over the crofts? That seems to me a great injustice—unless compensation is given."

"Well, it is a practice of long standing," said the young man (and Käthchen,

who cared very little about rents and holdings and drains, nevertheless thought he had so agreeable a voice that it was quite a pleasure to listen to him). "The crofters took the crofts knowing of this condition, and the rents were fixed accordingly. However, this is the present state of affairs, that the sheriff-substitute has decided against Macdonald—as he was bound to do, I admit. He has found him liable for arrears of rent, with interest and costs; and he has granted a warrant to turn him out. Now Macdonald is a stiff-necked man, a difficult man to deal with; and he doesn't know much English; it will be no use for the sheriff-officer to argue, and say he is only doing his duty——"

"I disapprove of the whole proceedings," said Mary, with decision. "Mr. Purdie had no right to go to such extremes without consulting me—and I will take care that it does not happen again. By the mail-car, did you say? Well, that won't be coming by Cruagan before half-past two; and I can be there by then. The sheriff's officer and his—his what did you call them?"

"His concurrents—assistants."

"They must wait for further instructions; and I will inquire into the matter myself."

He rose.

"I hope you will forgive me, Miss Stanley," said he, as he had said before, "for seeming to interfere. I have no wish to do anything of the kind. But I thought you ought to know in case there might be any trouble—which you could prevent."

"Mr. Ross," said she, "I am very much obliged to you. I—I don't get very much help—and—and I want to do what little I can for the people."

"Good morning!" said he; and he bowed to Kate Glendinning: he was going away without so much as shaking hands with either of them, so distant and respectful was his manner. But Mary, in a confused kind of fashion, did not seem to think this was right. She accompanied him to the door; and that she left open; then she went out with him into the hall.

"I cannot believe that James Macdonald should have any serious grudge against me," she said, "for I told Mr. Purdie to tell him that the tax for the dyke was abolished, and also that fifteen years of it was to be given back. And, besides that, I said to Macdonald myself that thirty shillings an acre was too much for that land; and I propose to have it reduced to a pound an acre when I have all the rents of the estate looked into."

"Do you think Purdie did tell him?" young Donald Ross asked coldly.

"If he has not!" said Mary ... "But I am almost sure he did—I spoke to Macdonald myself almost immediately afterwards. And—and I wished to tell you, Mr. Ross," she continued (as if she were rather pleading for favour, or at least expecting approval), "that I have been down to the stranger fishermen at Ru-Minard, and I think it is all settled, and that they are going away peaceably. I am paying

them for the lobster-traps that were burned—and perhaps a little more; and they understand that the Vagrant Act can be brought to bear on any others who may think of coming."

"Oh, they are going away?" said he.

"Yes."

"Mr. Purdie will be sorry for that."

"Why?"

"He could have had them removed, if he had wanted; but so long as they were an annoyance and vexation to the people here, he allowed them to remain—naturally."

These accents of contemptuous scorn: she was sorry to hear them somehow; and yet perhaps they were justified—she did not know.

"Good-bye," said she, at the hall door, and she held out her hand. "I am so much obliged to you."

And then of course he did shake hands with her in bidding her farewell—and raised his cap—and was gone.

Mary returned to the dining-room.

"Well, Mamie," said Käthchen, with a demure smile, "that is about the most extraordinary interview I ever heard of. A most handsome young gentleman calls upon a young lady—his first visit—and there is nothing talked of on either side but sheriff officers and summonses, rent, compensation, drains, crofts, grazing, and Acts of Parliament. Of course he was quite as bad as you; but all the same, you might at least have asked the poor man to stay to lunch."

"Oh, Käthchen!" Mary exclaimed, starting to her feet, her face on fire. "Shall I send Barbara after him? I never thought of it! How frightfully rude of me—and he has come all the way over from Heimra to tell me about this eviction. What shall I do? Shall I send after him?"

"I don't think you can," said Käthchen; "it would make the little oversight all the more marked. You'd better ask him the next time you see him—if you have forgotten certain warnings."

"What warnings?"

"Why, about his general character and his occupations," said Kate Glendinning, regarding her friend.

Mary was silent for a moment or two; then she said—

"We need not believe the worst of any one; and when you think of that old woman coming all the way from Canada to see him, that of itself is a testimonial to character that not many could bring forward—"

"But you must remember," said Käthchen, "the young master was a little boy of ten when Mrs. Armour left; and little boys of ten haven't had time to develop into dangerous criminals."

"Dangerous criminal?" said Mary, rather sharply; "that is hardly the—the proper phrase to use—with regard to—to a stranger. However, it is not of much consequence. Käthchen, are you going to drive with me to Cruagan to get that sheriff's officer and his men sent back?"

"Yes, certainly," said Käthchen, in her usual business-like fashion, "as soon as we have had lunch. And remember, Mamie, it wasn't *I* who forgot to ask him to stay."

Luncheon did not detain them long, and immediately thereafter they got into the waggonette that was waiting for them, and drove off. But it was not of the eviction and the possibility of another riot that Mary was mostly thinking; something very different was weighing, and weighing heavily, on her mind. They drove through the village in silence; they crossed the bridge; and they had begun the ascent of the steep hill before she spoke.

"The more I consider it," she said, "the more ashamed I am."

"Consider what?" said Käthchen.

"Why, neglecting to ask him to stay to lunch," she made answer—for this was what she had been brooding over.

"Why should you worry about such a trifle!" Käthchen protested.

"It isn't a trifle—in a Highlander's estimation, as you know well enough. They pride themselves on their hospitality; and they judge others by their own standards; so that I cannot but keep wondering what he must be thinking of me at this moment. Remember, Käthchen, when we went over to Heimra, even the old housekeeper entertained us, and did her best for us, in that out-of-the-world place; and here he comes to Lochgarra House—his first visit—he comes to do me a kindness—he comes to prevent mischief—and comes into the house that once was his own—and I don't offer him even a biscuit and a glass of sherry——"

"Really, Mary, you needn't worry about such a mere trifle!" Käthchen protested again.

"But I do worry!" she said. "I can imagine what he thought of me as he went away. For you must not forget this, Käthchen: it was a very awkward position he put himself into in order to do me a good turn. Think of his coming to the house, that ought to be his own—asking the servants if he might be admitted—sending up his name as a stranger—then he remains standing in the drawing-room—and he is for going away without shaking hands—as if he were hardly to be considered one's fellow-creature." She was silent for a second or two; then she said, with a sudden touch of asperity: "At the same time there is this to be remembered, that the pride that apes humility is the very worst kind of pride. Often it simply means that the person is inordinately vain."

"Poor young man!" said Käthchen, with a sigh. "He is always in the wrong. But I'm sure I did not object to his manner when he showed us the way out of

the Meall-na-Fearn bog."

About a couple of hundred yards on the Lochgarra side of Cruagan they met the mail-car; and when, a minute or two thereafter, they came in sight of the scattered crofts, it was obvious from the prevailing commotion that the sheriff's officer and his assistants had arrived. Indeed, when Mary and Käthchen descended from the waggonette and walked up to James Macdonald's cottage, the business of getting out the few poor sticks of furniture had already begun—the only onlooker being an old white-haired man, Macdonald's father, who was standing there dazed and bewildered, as if he did not understand what was going forward. Just as Mary got up, one of the concurrents brought out a spinning-wheel and put it on the ground.

"Here—what are you doing?" she said, angrily, to the man who appeared to be the chief officer. "Leave that spinning-wheel alone: that is the very thing I want to see in every cottage!"

"I've got the sheriff's warrant, ma'am," said the man, civilly enough. "And we must get everything out and take possession."

"Oh, no, you mustn't!" she said. "This man Macdonald claims compensation—the case must be inquired into——"

"I have nothing to do wi' that, ma'am," said the officer, who seemed a respectable, quiet-spoken, quiet-mannered kind of a person. "I'm bound to carry out the warrant—that's all I've to heed."

"But surely I can say whether I want the man turned out or not?" she protested. "He is my tenant. It is to me he owes the money. Surely, if I am satisfied, you can leave the man alone. But where is he? Where is Macdonald?"

"As for that, ma'am," said the officer, "he is away down the road, and he says he is going to fetch a gun. Very well. If he presents a gun at either me or my concurrents I will declare myself deforced, and he will have to answer for it before the sheriff."

"A gun?" said Mary, rather faintly. "Do you mean to drive the poor man to desperation?"

But there was a more immediate danger to be considered. As the two girls had driven up they had heard a good deal of shrill calling from croft to croft and from house to house; and now there had assembled a crowd of women—a crowd hostile and menacing—that came swarming up, uttering all sorts of angry and reproachful cries. Each time that the sheriff's officer's assistants appeared at the door of the cottage there was another outburst of hooting and groaning; while here and there a bare-armed virago had furnished herself with an apron-full of rubbish—potato-peelings, cabbage-stalks, stale fish, and the like—and these unsavoury missiles began to hurtle through the air, though for the most part they were badly aimed. The sheriff's officer affected to pay no heed. He calmly

watched the proceedings of his men; the rubbish flew past him unregarded; and the women had not yet taken to stones.

But Käthchen beheld this advancing crowd with undisguised alarm.

"Mary," she said, hurriedly, "don't you think we should go back to the waggonette? Those people think it is you who are setting the sheriff's officers on—they are hooting at us as well——"

There could be no doubt of the fact; and the infuriated women were drawing nearer and nearer; while, if their taunts and epithets were to her unintelligible, their wrathful glances and threatening gestures were unmistakeable. Mary Stanley found herself helpless. She could not explain to them. She had not the self-possession with which to address this exasperated mob, even if she knew the language in which alone it was possible to appeal to them. Nor dared she retreat, for would not that be simply inviting a general attack? So she was standing, irresolute and bewildered, when there was a new diversion of interest: the man Macdonald made his appearance. She looked at him; she hardly recognised him—so ashen-grey had his cheeks become with excitement and wrath. One trembling hand held a gun; the other he clenched and shook in the face of the officer as he went up to him.

"I—not owing any money!" said the Russian-looking crofter, and his features were working with passion, and his eyes were filled with a baleful light under his shaggy eyebrows. "No—no—God's curse to me if I pay money when I not owing any money! Go away, now—go away back to Dingwall—or it is murder there will be——"

Mary was very pale; but she went forward to him all the same.

"Put away that gun," she said, and she spoke with firmness, though her lips had lost their natural colour. "Put away that gun! These men are doing their duty—you have brought it on yourself."

He turned upon her savagely.

"You—it's not you—my laird—Ross of Heimra, he my laird—you come here, ay, to steal the land—and—and put me from my croft—ay—will you be putting me from my croft?"

In his fury he could find no more English; but he advanced towards her, his clenched fist raised; and here it was that Käthchen (though her heart was beating wildly) thrust herself forward between them.

"How dare you!" she said, indignantly. "Stand back! How dare you!"

For an instant the man's eyes glared at her—as if in his indescribable rage he knew neither what to do or say; but just at this moment his attention was drawn else-whither; a volley of groans and yells from the crowd had greeted the reappearance of the assistants. At sight of these enemies bringing out his poor bits of things, Macdonald's wrath was turned in a new direction; he made a dash

for the cottage—managed to get inside—and the next second the two men were flung headlong out, while the door was instantly slammed to behind them. A great shout of triumph and laughter arose from the crowd, while the discomfited officers picked themselves up and gazed blankly at the barred way.

"I call you to witness," said their chief to Miss Stanley—and he spoke in the calmest manner, as if this were quite an every-day occurrence—"that I have been deforced in the execution of my duty. This man will have to answer for it at Dingwall."

But his assistants were not so imperturbable. Smarting under the jeers of the crowd, they proceeded to cast about for some implement with which to effect an entrance; and presently they found an axe. With this one of them set to work; and crash! crash! went the weight of iron on to the trembling door. The wood began to yield. Splinters showed—then a narrow breach was made—the hole grew wider—and just as it became evident that the demolition of the door was but a matter of a few minutes, a heavier stroke than usual snapped the shaft of the axe in twain, the iron head falling inside the cottage. By this time the attitude of the crowd had again altered—from derision to fierce resentment; there were groans renewed again and again; missiles flew freely. And then again, and quite suddenly, an apparently trivial incident entirely changed the aspect of affairs. At that ragged opening that had been made in the door there appeared two small black circles, close together; and these were pushed outward a few inches. The concurrents fell back—and the crowd was silent; well they perceived what this was; those two small circles were the muzzle of a gun; at any moment, a violent death—a shattered corpse—might be the next feature of the scene.

"What does that madman mean to do!" Mary exclaimed, in a paralysis of terror—for it appeared to her that she was responsible for all that was happening or might happen.

"Mary," said Käthchen, under her breath—and she was all trembling with excitement, "you must come away at once—now—while they are watching the gun. Perhaps they won't interfere with us—we may get down to the waggonette—we may have to run for it, too, if those women should turn on us."

"I cannot go and leave these poor men here," Mary said, in her desperation. "They will be murdered. That man in there is a madman—a downright madman—"

Käthchen lowered her voice still further.

"There is Mr. Ross coming—and oh! I wish he would be quick!"

Indeed it was no other than Donald Ross, who, immediately after leaving Lochgarra House, had struck off across the hills, hoping by a short cut to reach Cruagan not long after Miss Stanley's arrival. And now that he appeared, all eyes were turned towards him; there was no further groaning, or hooting, or hurling

of missiles. He seemed to take in the situation at a glance. He asked a question of the sheriff's officer.

"I'll just have to come back, sir," said the man, "with an inspector and a dozen police; but in the meantime I declare that I have been deforced, and this man Macdonald must answer for it. I hope ye'll give evidence, sir, if the leddies would rather not come over to Dingwall. You were not here when my assistants were thrown out of the house; but at least you can see a gun pointed at us—there it is—through that door."

Young Ross did not go directly forward to the muzzle of the gun—which would have been the act of a lunatic, for the man inside the cottage might make a mistake; but he went towards the front of the house, then approached the door, and struck up the gun with his fist. One barrel went off—harmlessly enough.

"Hamish!"

He called again; and added something in Gaelic. The door was opened. There was some further speech in the same tongue; the shaggy-browed crofter laid aside the gun, and came out into the open air, looking about him like a wild-beast at bay, but following the young master submissively enough. Donald Ross went up to Miss Stanley.

"I was afraid there might be a little trouble," said he. "Well, I can answer for this man—if you will get the sheriff's officer and his assistants to go away."

"I want them to go away!" she said. "I have no wish at all to put James Macdonald out of his croft—not in the least—and I will give him time to pay up arrears, especially as there is to be a re-valuation. I wish you would tell him that. I wish you would tell him that I had nothing to do with these proceedings. Tell him I want to deal fairly with everybody. You can talk to him—I cannot—I cannot explain to him——"

But Macdonald had been listening all the same.

"That woman," said he, sullenly, "she—no business here. The land—Ross of Heimra's——"

Young Ross turned to him with a muttered exclamation in Gaelic, and with a flash of flame in the coal-black eyes that did not escape Käthchen's notice. The stubborn crofter was silent after that—standing aside in sombre indifference.

"The officer can bring his action for deforcement, if he likes," Ross said, "and I suppose Macdonald will be fined forty shillings. But no one has been hurt; and it seems a pity there should be any further proceedings, if, as you say, you are going to have a re-valuation of the crofts"—and then he suddenly checked himself. "I hope you will forgive me for interfering," he said, quite humbly; "I did not intend to say anything; it is Mr. Purdie's business—and I do not wish even to offer you advice."

"I wish I could tell you how much I am obliged to you," she said, warmly. "If

you had not let me know about those men coming, and if you had not appeared yourself, I believe there would have been murder done here this day. And now, Mr. Ross, would you get them to go on at once to Lochgarra, so as to be out of harm's way—and to-morrow they can go back by the mail-car? I will write to Mr. Purdie. There must be no further proceedings; and James Macdonald will not be put out of his croft—not if I have any say in the matter."

So the three officials were started off for the village; the morose crofter proceeded to pick up his bits of furniture and get them into the house again; and the crowd of women began to disperse—not silently, however, but with much shrill and eager decision—towards their own homes. Young Ross of Heimra went down with the two young ladies to the waggonette, which was waiting for them below in the road.

He saw them into the carriage.

"But won't you drive back with us?" said Mary.

"Oh, thank you—if I may," he said, rather diffidently; and therewith he went forward to get up beside the coachman, just as Mr. Purdie would have done.

The colour rushed to Mary's forehead.

"Mr. Ross," she said, "not there!"—and she herself opened the door of the waggonette for him, so that perforce he had to take his place beside them. And was this again (she may have asked herself) the pride that apes humility; or was it only part of his apparent desire to keep a marked distance between himself and her? She was vexed with him for causing her this embarrassment. He had no right to do such things. He might be a little more friendly. She, on her part, had been frank enough in expressing her obligations to him; nay, she had gone out of her way to ask, in a kind of fashion, for his approval. Were all the advances to come from her side?

But Kate Glendinning noticed this—that as they drew near to the dried-up waste that had once been Loch Heimra, and as they were passing the tumbled-down ruins of the ancient stronghold, he pretended that he did not see anything. He rather turned away his face. He talked of indifferent matters. Mary had forgotten that they would have to pass by Loch and Castle Heimra, or perhaps she might have thought twice about inviting him to drive with them. But quite simply and resolutely he turned away from those things that all too eloquently spoke of the irreparable wrong that had been done to him and his, and affected not to see them or remember them; and Käthchen—a not uninterested observer—said proudly to herself: "If that is not Highland courtesy, I do not know what is."

Wonders will never cease, truly. That evening the astounding rumour had found its way through the length and breadth of the township: there were eye-witnesses who could testify: Young Donald of Heimra had been seen in the same

carriage with the two ladies from Lochgarra House.

CHAPTER III.
A CROFTERS' COMMISSION.

One morning Mary Stanley and her companion had been away on some distant errand, and when on their return they came to the summit of the hill overlooking the bay, Mary paused for a moment to take in the prospect—the wide, grey, wind-swept plain of the sea, the long headlands, and the lonely Heimra Island out in the west. But Käthchen did not cease her discourse—in which she was endeavouring to account for the comparative failure, so far, of her friend's fine philanthropic schemes.

"The truth is, Mamie," said she, "what has disappointed you here has been the prevalence of hard facts—very hard facts—facts as hard as the rocks on which the poor people try to live. You wanted to play the part of Lady Bountiful; and you yourself are just full of enthusiasm, and generous emotion, and ideals of duty and self-sacrifice, and—and—romanticism generally, if I may say so. And for all these qualities you find no exercise, no outlet. I can imagine you in very different circumstances—in London, perhaps, or in some English village: I can imagine your going into a squalid room where there is a poor widow by the bedside of her dying boy; and the Lady Bountiful brings little comforts for the sick child, and words of kindness and consolation for the mother; and the poor woman looks on you as an angel, and would kiss the hem of your gown; and it's all very pretty and touching. But, you see," continued the practical Käthchen, "how you are baffled and thwarted in this obdurate place; for there isn't a single case of illness in the whole district—not one—which is no doubt owing to the valuable antiseptic properties of peat-smoke!"

"Oh, well," said Mary, cheerfully, as they went on again. "I can put up with being disappointed on that score—and the longer the better. But, Käthchen, when you said there was nothing but hard facts about here—no pretty sentiment and sympathy—you weren't keeping your eyes open. Look down there at the bridge; what is that if not pretty sentiment?—two lovers talking—why, it is quite a charming picture!—and isn't there some rustic custom of pledging troth over a running stream?"

Her face suddenly grew grave; and Käthchen, also regarding those two

figures, was struck by the same surmise.

"It is Mr. Ross, Mamie!" she exclaimed, in an undertone—though they were still a long way off.

Mary said nothing. She walked on calmly and indifferently, sometimes looking up to the hills, sometimes looking out to Heimra Island and the sea. It was Käthchen, keeping her eyes covertly on those two figures by the bridge, who observed that the girl suddenly separated herself from her companion, and disappeared into the woods by the side of the Garra. As for Donald Ross, he made no sign of going away: on the contrary, he remained idling by the rude stone parapet, occasionally looking into the water underneath. And he must have known that he was intercepting the two ladies from Lochgarra House—there was no escape for them.

Mary maintained a perfect self-possession; and when they came up to him she was for passing with a little bow of recognition; but he spoke.

"I have a small petition to put before you," said he, with a smile (Käthchen thought that, though he looked extremely handsome, this pleasant and familiar smile was in the circumstances something of an impertinence).

"Indeed," said Mary—and she waited.

"From a very humble petitioner," he continued (and Käthchen began to consider him a most unabashed young man—so easily and lightly he spoke), "one who has no English, and she has asked me to interfere and tell you all about her case. She was talking to me just now; but when she caught sight of you she fled off into the woods, like a hare."

"Why?" said Mary, coldly.

"Because she is afraid of you," said he. "She thinks you are a friend of the *Troich Bheag Dhearg*—the Little Red Dwarf—as they call Mr. Purdie about here. And that is quite enough to frighten Anna——"

"Anna?" said Mary. "Do you mean Anna Chlannach—the half-witted girl?"—and as she guessed the simple and harmless truth an indescribable confusion appeared on her forehead and in the self-consciousness of her eyes.

"Yes," said he, apparently not noticing. "Anna says that you spoke to her once; but she has no English, and could not tell you anything; and she saw Purdie with you, and ran away. So much I made out, though she talks rather wildly, and mysteriously as well."

"Oh, but Mr. Ross," said Mary, with some eagerness, "I wish you would tell Anna Chlannach that she has no reason to be afraid of me—surely not! Why, she was the first creature in the place who seemed a little friendly. Will you tell her I will do everything for her I can; and that she must come and see me; and there will be no fear of her meeting Mr. Purdie; and Barbara can be the interpreter between us? Will you tell her that? Could you find her now?"

"There's no one in this neighbourhood who could find Anna Chlannach if she wants to be hidden," he said, with a bit of a laugh that showed beautiful teeth—as Käthchen remarked. "But I shall come across her some other time, and of course, if you grant her petition, she must go to you and thank you."

"What is her petition?" said Mary, who had recovered from her momentary confusion, and was now prepared to be entirely bland and magnanimous—which, indeed, was her natural mood.

"Well," said he, "Purdie—Mr. Purdie—has been threatening to have her shut up in some asylum for imbeciles—so they say—-and Anna is in a great state about the possibility of her being taken away from among the people she knows. I don't think it is true, myself; indeed I doubt whether he could do anything of the kind, without the consent of her relatives, and she has got none now; but I am not quite sure what the law is; anyhow, what I imagine to be the case is simply that Mr. Purdie has been making use of these threats to spite the people with whom Anna Chlannach is a favourite. For she is a general favourite—there is no harm in the girl——"

"Why, so Barbara said!" Mary exclaimed.

"It is quite true that she is rather useless about the place," Donald Ross went on. "Sometimes they have tried her with a bit of herding; but then, if she saw a boat out at sea, she would imagine her mother was coming back, and she would go away down to the shore to meet her, and spend her time in gathering white shells, that she thinks is money, to give to her mother. Well, you see, that is awkward. You couldn't leave sheep or cows under Anna's care without asking somebody to keep an eye on Anna herself. The truth is, she is useless. But there's no harm in the lass; and the people are fond of her; there's always a bit of food, or a corner for her to sleep in; so that she's not a cost to anyone except to those that are willing to pay it—a mere trifle—and in any case it does not come out of Mr. Purdie's pocket——"

"She shall not be shut up in any asylum, if I have any say in the matter!" Mary interposed, with a touch of indignation.

"I asked her to stay and appeal to yourself," he continued. "But she was frightened of you——"

"Yes," said Mary, "everyone is frightened of me—or set against me—in this place!"

"There is another thing I should mention," he proceeded—ignoring this taunt, if it was meant as a taunt; "the young girls and lads about here are not very considerate if there's any fun going on; and they've heard of this proposal of Purdie's; and so they amuse themselves by telling Anna Chlannach that she is going to be taken away and shut up in an asylum, and the poor girl is dreadfully frightened. But if you can assure her that you will not allow Purdie to do any

such thing——"

"Well, of course I will, if you will only bring her to me!" said Mary, impetuously. "Why haven't you brought her to me before?"

He hesitated. Then he said—

"I am very much obliged to you. I will tell Anna Chlannach the first time I see her. Good morning, Miss Stanley!"

But Mary would not have that; she said boldly—

"Are you not going down to the village?—won't you walk with us?"

He could hardly refuse the invitation; and as they went on towards the little township, what she was saying in her heart was this—'Here, you people, all of you, if you are at your cottage doors or working on your crofts, don't you see this now, that Mr. Ross of Heimra is walking with me, with all the world to witness? Do you understand what that means? It is true my uncle drained Loch Heimra and tore down Castle Heimra into a heap of ruins; and the Rosses of Heimra, and you also, may have had reason to hate the name of Stanley; But look at this—look at Young Donald walking with me—in a kind of a way proclaiming himself my friend—and consider what that means. A feud? There is no feud if he and I say there shall be none. I cannot restore Castle Heimra, but it is within his power to forgive and to forget.'

That is what she was somewhat proudly saying to herself as they walked into the village—past the smithy—past the weaver's cottage—past the schoolhouse—past the post-office—past the inn and its dependencies; and she hoped that everyone would see, and reflect. But of course she could not speak in that fashion to Donald Ross.

"You might have told me about Anna Chlannach before," she said.

"I did not like to interfere," he made answer.

"You seem very sensitive on that point!" she retorted.

"Well, it is natural," he said, with something of reserve; and instinctively she felt that she could go no further in that direction.

"Are you remaining long on the mainland at present?" she asked, in an ordinary kind of way.

"Until this afternoon only: I shall go back to Heimra after the mail-cart has come in."

"It must be very lonely out there," she said—glancing towards the remote island among the grey and driven seas.

"It is lonely—now," he said.

And then she hesitated. For he had never spoken to her of his circumstances in any way whatever; he had always been so distant and respectful; and she hardly knew whether she might venture to betray any interest. But at length she said—

"I can very well understand that there must be a charm in living all by one's self in a lonely island like that—for a time, at least—and yet—yet—it does seem like throwing away one's opportunities. I think I should want some definite occupation—among my fellow creatures."

"Oh, yes, no doubt," said he, in no wise taking her timorous suggestion as a reproach. "In my own case, I could not leave the island so long as my mother was alive; I never even thought of such a thing; so that being shut up in Eilean Heimra was not in the least irksome to me. Not in the least. She and I were sufficient companions for each other—anywhere. But now it is different. Now I am free to look about. And I am reading up for the Bar as a preliminary step."

"Oh, indeed?" said she. "Do you mean to practise as a lawyer?"

"No, I think not," he made reply; and now Käthchen was indeed listening with interest—more interest than she usually displayed over rents and drains and sheriff's decrees. "But being a barrister is a necessary qualification for a good many appointments; and if I were once called to the Bar I might perhaps get some sort of post in one of the colonies."

"In one of the colonies?" Mary repeated; "and leave Eilean Heimra for ever?"

"Well, I don't know about that," said he, absently. "At all events, I should not like to part with the island—I mean, I should not like to sell it. It is the last little bit of a foothold; and the name has been in our family for a long while; and—and there are other associations. No; rather than sell the bit of an island, I think I should be content to remain a prisoner there for the rest of my life. However, all that is in the air at present," he continued more lightly. "The main thing is that I am not quite so lonely out at Eilean Heimra as you might imagine—I have my books for companions any way."

"Then you are very busy?" she said, thoughtfully. "I must not say I am sorry; and yet I was going to ask you——"

"I should be very busy indeed," said he, "if I could not find time to do anything for you that you wished me to do." (And here Käthchen said proudly to herself: 'Well, Mamie, and what do you think of that as a speech for a Highlander?')

"Ah, but this is something rather serious," said she. "The fact is, I want to form a little private commission—a commission among ourselves—for the resettlement of the whole estate. I want every crofter's case fully investigated; every grievance, if he has any, inquired into; all the rents overhauled and reduced to what is quite easy and practicable and just; and a percentage of the arrears—perhaps all the arrears—cut off, if it is found desirable. I want to be able to say: 'There, now, I have done what is fair on my side: are you going to do what is fair on yours?' And I have got Mr. Watson to consent to give up the pasturage

of Meall-na-Cruagan; and that must be valued and taken off his rent; and then when the pasturage is divided among the Cruagan crofters—oh, well, perhaps I shan't ask them for anything!"

"You seem to wish to act very generously by them," said he, with a grave simplicity.

"Oh, I tell you I have plenty of schemes!" she said, half laughing at her own enthusiasm. "But I get no sympathy—no encouragement. There is Miss Glendinning, who simply sits and mocks——"

"Mamie, how can you say such things!" Käthchen protested—for what would this handsome young gentleman from Heimra think of her?

"I have two new hand-looms coming next week," Mary continued; "and I am going to send to the Inverness Exhibition, and to Dudley House, if there is another bazaar held there; and I am going to give local prizes, too; and I may get over some of the Harris people to show them the best dyes, and so forth. But all that will take time; and in the meanwhile I am chiefly anxious to put myself right with the tenants by means of this commission and a complete revision of the rents. A commission they can trust—formed of people they know——"

"They will be ill to please if they don't meet you half way—and gladly," said young Ross.

Mary Stanley's eyes shone with pleasure at these hopeful words: she had not met with much encouragement hitherto.

"Does Mr. Watson know Gaelic?" was her next question.

"In a kind of a way, I should imagine," he said. "He is a south countryman; but I should think he knew as much Gaelic as was necessary for his business."

"And to talk to the people about general things—about their crops—and their rents?" she asked again.

"In a kind of a way he might."

"But you—you know Gaelic very well?" she said.

"I think I may fairly say that I do," he confessed frankly enough.

"Then," said she, "if you could find the time, would not that be sufficient to form a commission—Mr. Watson, and you, and I? There would be no kind of conflicting interests; and we should all want to do what was equitable and right by the people."

"Oh," said he, in a wondering sort of way, "there would be only these three—Mr. Watson, yourself, and I?"

"Mr. Purdie," said she, "would simply be a kind of clerk——"

And instantly his face changed.

"Mr. Purdie," said he, "is he coming to take part in it?"

"Only as a kind of clerk," she said quickly. "He would merely register our decisions. And of course he knows the people and all the circumstances; he could

give us what information we wanted, and we could form our own judgment."

But there was no return to his face of that sympathetic interest that she had read there for a brief moment or two. His manner had entirely altered; and as they were now close to Lochgarra House, he had to take his leave.

"As far as I am concerned, Miss Stanley," said he, "I would rather leave this resettlement in Mr. Purdie's hands. Intermeddlers only make mischief, and get little thanks for their pains."

She was disappointed and hurt; and yet too proud to appeal further. He bade them good-bye—a little coldly, as Käthchen thought—and left; and Mary Stanley and her friend went into the house. All that Mary said was—

"Well, we must do the best we can, Mr. Watson, Mr. Purdie, and myself. I don't suppose Mr. Watson has any reason to be stiff-necked, and malevolent, and revengeful."

A couple of days thereafter Mr. Purdie arrived; and the Little Red Dwarf appeared to bear with much equanimity the rating that Miss Stanley administered to him over his action in the James Macdonald case.

"Oh, ay," said he, "Macdonald will find out now who is master—the law, or himself. He is the most ill-condeetioned man in the whole district—an ill-condeetioned, thrawn, contentious rascal, and the worst example possible for his neighbours; but he'll find out now; he'll find out that the law is not to be defied with impunity——"

"What do you mean?" said she. "I told you to stop all proceedings."

"I cannot stop the Procurator-Fiscal," said the Troich Bheag Dhearg, grimly, "when he institutes a prosecution for deforcement of the sheriff's officer."

"But I got the sheriff's officer to go away peaceably," said she; "and I told him that the case would be inquired into."

"Just that," replied Mr. Purdie, with a certain self-assurance. "But it was not the business of the sheriff's officer to inquire into the case at all. He had merely to execute the sheriff's warrant; and in doing that, as he now declares, he was deforced. Macdonald will find out whether he can set the law at defiance—even with that mischief-making ne'er-do-weel Donald Ross at his elbow egging him on."

"Mr. Ross did not egg him on!" said Mary Stanley, indignantly; "for I was there, and saw the whole transaction. Mr. Ross interfered for the sake of peace, or there would have been murder done."

"Ay? and I wonder what right has Mr. Ross to interfere wi' the Lochgarra tenants!" said Mr. Purdie, rather scornfully—but with an angry light twinkling in his small blue eyes.

"Because I asked him," said Mary, drawing herself up. "And I will ask him again, when it suits me."

Mr. Purdie said nothing. His heavily down-drawn mouth was more than usually dogged in expression; and it was with difficulty Mary extracted from him the information that the punishment the sheriff would most likely inflict on Macdonald was a fine of forty shillings, with the alternative of three weeks' imprisonment.

"I will pay the fine," said she, promptly. "I did not authorise you to have that man turned out of his croft; and I won't have anyone turned out until I have a thorough investigation made, and the rents revised, and the arrears cancelled."

But when she proceeded to place before him the comprehensive project she had formed—to carry out which he had been summoned from Inverness—the factor abandoned his obstinate attitude, and became almost plaintive.

"Ye'll ruin the estate, Miss Stanley; and ye'll not make these people one whit more contented. Have I not had experience of them, years and years before you ever came to the place? And now that the Land League is their god, nothing will satisfy them but getting crofts and farms, arable land and pasture, all rent free, and the landlords taking the first train for the South. The poor, deluded craytures—if it was not for their spite and ill-will—one could almost peety them; for what would be the advantage to them of a lot of useless land, with no stock to put on it? But maybe they expect to have the stock bought and given to them as well?—I would not wonder! There's they scoundrels in the newspapers, that do not know the difference between a barn-door and a peat-stack, they've filled the heads o' the ignorant craytures with all kinds of nonsense, and they would have the deer-forests divided up—the deer-forests!—they might as well try to plough, sow, and reap the Atlantic—"

"All that does not concern me," she said, interrupting him without scruple. "What does concern me is to have myself put right, in the first place. That is to say, I wish to have rents fixed that the people can pay without getting into arrears—just rents, so that they can have no right to complain."

"Ay, and ye'll go on remitting this and remitting that," said the factor; "and if ye remitted everything they would still grumble! I tell ye, Miss Stanley, I've had experience; and it's not the way to treat these people. The more ye give them, the more they'll ask. What you consider justice, they will consider weakness; they will expect more and more; and complain if they do not get it. I'm telling ye the truth, Miss Stanley, about these idle, and ill-willed, and ill-thrawn craytures: what you propose is no the way to deal wi' them at all——"

"But I propose to take that way none the less," said Mary. And Käthchen, sitting there, and listening, and regarding the Troich Bheag Dhearg, said to herself: 'My good friend, you have tremendous shoulders, and a powerful mouth, and suspicious and vindictive eyes; but you don't in the least know with whom you have to do. Your obstinacy won't answer; and if you are discreet, you will

allow it to subside.'

"I have done my best for the estate," he said, with some stiffness.

"Yes," said Mary, "no doubt. But then the result that has been arrived at is not quite satisfactory—according to modern notions. Perhaps the old way was the best; but I am going to try the new—and I suppose I can do what I like with my own, as the saying is. And so, Mr. Purdie, I wish you to go out to-morrow morning and call on Mr. Watson, and give him my compliments—oh, no," she said, interrupting herself: "on second thoughts I will drive out to Craiglarig myself—for it is a great favour I have to ask. Will you dine with us this evening, Mr. Purdie?"

"I thank ye, but I hope ye'll excuse me," said the factor. "I have some various things to look into, and I'll just give the evening to them at the inn."

"Then we shall see you in the morning"—and therewithal the Little Red Dwarf took his departure.

Now to tell the truth, when the sheep-farmer of Craiglarig was asked to assist in this scheme, he did not express himself very hopefully as to the issue; but he was a good-natured man; and he said he would place as much of his time at Miss Stanley's disposal as he reasonably could. And so they set to work to revalue the crofts. No doubt the composition of this amateur court might have been impugned; for it consisted of the owner of the estate, her factor, and her chief tenant; but then again Mary constituted herself, from the very outset, the champion of the occupants of the smaller holdings, Mr. Purdie took the side of the landlords, while Mr. Watson, apart from his services as interpreter, maintained a benevolent neutrality. It was slow and not inspiriting work; for the crofters did not seem to believe that any amelioration of their condition was really meant; they were too afraid to speak, or too sullen to speak; and when they did speak, in many cases their demands were preposterous. But Mary stuck to her task.

"I must put myself right, to begin with," she said, as she had said all along. "Thereafter we will see."

And sometimes she would look out towards Heimra Island; and there was a kind of reproach in her heart. How much easier would all this have been for them, if only young Ross had consented to put aside for the moment that fierce internecine feud between him and the factor! Was Mr. Purdie, she asked herself, the sort of man that Donald Ross of Heimra should raise to the rank of being his enemy? However, the days passed, and there was no sign—no glimmer of the white sails of the *Sirène* coming away from the distant shores—no mention of the young master having been seen anywhere on the mainland.

"I warrant," said Mr. Purdie, when some remark chanced to be made, "I warrant I can tell where that cheat-the-gallows is off to—away to France for more o' that smuggled brandy so that he can spend his days and nights in drunkenness

and debauchery!"

"You forget, Mr. Purdie," said Käthchen, with something very nearly approaching disdain, "that we have made the acquaintance of Mr. Ross, and know something of himself and his habits."

"Do ye?" he said, turning upon her. "I tell ye, ye do not! And a good thing ye do not! A smooth-tongued hypocrite—specious—sly—it is well for ye that ye are ignorant of what that poaching, mischief-making dare-devil really is; but ye'll find out in time—ye'll find out in time."

And indeed it was not until the self-appointed commission had done its work, and Mr. Purdie had gone away to the south again, that young Ross of Heimra reappeared: he said he had heard of what had been arranged; and he thought Miss Stanley had been most generous. This casual encounter took place just as Mary and Kate Glendinning were nearing Lochgarra House; and when they had gone inside, Käthchen said—

"Well, I don't know what has come over you, Mamie. You used always to be so self-possessed—to seem as if you were conferring a favour by merely looking at anyone. And now, when you stand for a few minutes talking to Mr. Ross, you are quite nervous and shamefaced—and apparently anxious for the smallest sign of approval——"

"You have far too much imagination, Käthchen," said Mary, as she went off to her own room.

And then again, that same night, Käthchen was at one of the windows, looking out. She could not distinguish anything, for it was quite dark; she could only hear the wind howling in from the sea.

"Do you know where you should be at this moment, Mamie?" she said. "You ought to be going up the grand staircase of some great opera-house—your cloak of crimson velvet, white-furred—the diamonds in your hair shining through your lace hood—and you should have at least three gentlemen to escort you to your box, carrying opera-glasses, and flowers. That's more like you. And yet here you banish yourself away to this out-of-the-world place—you seek for no amusement—you busy yourself all day about peats, and drains, and seed-potatoes—and the highest reward you set before yourself is to get a half-hearted 'Thank you' from a sulky crofter——"

"Käthchen," said Mary, "I would advise you to read the third chapter of the General Epistle of James."

"Ah, well," said Käthchen—and she was not deeply offended by that hint about the bridling of the tongue—"wait till your brother and Mr. Frank Meredyth come up—and you'll find them saying the same thing. Philanthropy is all very well; but you need not make yourself a white slave." And then she turned to the black window again, and to her visions. "There's one thing, Mamie: I wish Mr.

Ross could see you going up that grand staircase."

CHAPTER IV.
HER GUEST.

"It will be all different now," said Käthchen, one evening, when they were come to within a week of the arrival of Mary's brother and his friend Frank Meredyth. "And you deserve some little rest, Mamie, and some little amusement, after all your hard work. And I want you to be considerate—towards Mr. Meredyth, I mean. It isn't merely grouse and grilse that are bringing him here. You know what your brother says—that there is no one in such request for shooting parties; he could just have his pick of invitations, all over Scotland, every autumn; so you may be sure it isn't merely for the grouse and the salmon-fishing he is coming to a little place like Lochgarra. Oh, you need not pretend to deny it, Mamie! And all I want is that you should be a little considerate. He may be very anxious to have you, and yet not quite so anxious to take over your hobby as well. He may not even be interested in the price of home-knitted stockings."

Mary Stanley did not answer just at once. The two girls were slowly walking up and down the stone terrace outside the house. It was ten o'clock at night; but it was not yet dark, nor anything approaching to dark. All the world was of a pale, clear, wan lilac colour: and in this coldly luminous twilight any white object—the front of a cottage, for example, or the little Free Church building across the bay—appeared startlingly distinct. There was an absolute silence; the sea was still; two hours ago the sun had gone down behind what seemed a vast and motionless lake of molten copper; and now there was a far-reaching expanse of pearly grey, with the long headlands and Eilean Heimra gathering shadows around them. The heavens were cloudless and serene; over the sombre hills in the east a star throbbed here and there, but it had to be sought for. There appeared to be neither lamp nor candle down in the village—there was no need of them on these magical summer nights.

"I do not see that it will be so different," said Mary, presently. "Fred will have to look after Mr. Meredyth. No doubt there will be something of a commotion in so quiet a place—the dogs, and keepers, and ponies; by the way, there will be gillies wanted for the fishing as well as for the shooting later on——"

Käthchen began to snigger a little.

"I do believe, Mamie," she said, "that that is all the interest you have in the shooting—it will provide so much more employment for your beloved crofters."

"Oh, yes, I suppose the place will be a little more brisk and lively," Mary continued, "though that won't improve it much in my estimation. I wonder what made Fred hire that wretched little steam-launch." She looked towards the tiny vessel that was lying close to the quay: the small white funnel and the decks forward were visible in the mystic twilight; the hull was less clearly defined. "Fancy that thing coming sputtering and crackling into the bay on a beautiful night like this!"

"It would be very handy to take a message out to Heimra Island," said Käthchen, demurely.

Mary glanced at her, and laughed.

"My dear Käthchen, curiosity is a humiliating weakness; but I will tell you what is in the letter that is lying on the hall table—and that is likely to lie there, unless a wind springs up from some quarter to-morrow. It is an invitation to Mr. Ross to come and dine with us on Monday next."

"Monday?" said Kate Glendinning, looking surprised. "The very day your brother and Mr. Meredyth come here?"

"For that very reason," said Mary. "I wish Mr. Ross to understand why we have never asked him to dine with us—well, of course he would understand for himself—two girls, living by themselves—and—and knowing him only for so short a time. But now, you see, I ask him for the very first evening that my brother is in the house—and that's all right and correct—if there's any Mrs. Grundy in Lochgarra."

"The Free Church Minister!" said Käthchen, spitefully—for she had never forgiven the good man for his having kept aloof from the fray at Ru-Minard.

"Mr. Ross has been very kind to me—in his reserved and distant way," Mary said, "and I should not like him to think me ungrateful——"

"He cannot do that," said Käthchen, "if he hasn't been blind to what your eyes have said to him again and again."

"What do you mean, Käthchen?" Mary demanded—at once alarmed and resentful.

Käthchen retreated quickly: it had been a careless remark.

"Oh, I don't mean anything. I mean your eyes have said 'Thank you,' again and again; and it is but right they should. He has indeed been very thoughtful and kind—and always so respectful—keeping himself in the background. Oh, you need not be afraid, Mamie: you won't find me suggesting that you shouldn't have the most frank and friendly relations with Mr. Ross. At the same time——"

"Yes, at the same time?"

"I was wondering," said Käthchen, with a little hesitation, "how he might

get on with your brother and Mr. Meredyth—or, rather, how they might get on with him—–"

"My brother and Mr. Meredyth," said Mary, a little proudly, "will remember that Mr. Ross is my guest: that will be enough."

But Kate Glendinning's uneasy forecast was not without some justification—as Mary was soon to discover. The two visitors from the South arrived on the Monday afternoon, and there were many curious eyes covertly following the waggonette as it drove through the village. Of the two strangers, the taller, who was Mary Stanley's brother, was a young fellow of about four or five-and-twenty, good looking rather, of the fair English type, with an aquiline nose, a pretty little yellow-white moustache, and calm grey eyes. His companion, some eight or ten years older, was of middle height, or perhaps a trifle under, active and wiry-looking, with a sun-tanned face, a firm mouth, and shrewd eyes, that on the whole were also good-natured. Both of the travellers were in high spirits—and no wonder: they had heard good accounts of the grouse; they had just caught a glimpse of the Garra, which had plenty of water after the recent rains; over there was the little steam launch that could amuse them now and again for an idle hour; and beyond the bay the big, odd-looking house, against its background of fir and larch, seemed to offer them a hospitable welcome.

Mary was at the top of the semicircular flight of stairs to greet them; but even as she accompanied them into the great oak hall she instinctively felt that there was something unusual in her brother's manner towards her. And when, presently, Mr. Meredyth had been taken away to be shown his own room, Fred Stanley remained behind: Käthchen had not yet put in an appearance, for some reason or another.

"Well, what's the matter, Fred?" Mary said at once.

He had been kicking about the drawing-room in a discontented fashion, staring out of the windows or glancing at the engravings while his friend was there; but now these two were alone.

"The matter?" said he. "Plenty the matter! I don't like to find that you have been making a fool of yourself, and that you are still bent on making a fool of yourself."

"But we can't help it if we are born that way," she said, sweetly.

"Oh, you know quite well what I mean," said this tall young gentleman with the boyish moustache. "I had heard something of it before; but I thought we might as well stop the night at Inverness on the way north; and I saw Mr. Purdie. Now, mind you, Mamie, don't you take it into your head that Purdie said anything against you—he did not. He's a shrewd-headed fellow, and knows which side his bread is buttered. But he answered my questions. And I find you have just been ruining this place—turning the whole neighbourhood into a

pauper asylum—and—and flinging the thing away, as you might call it."

"But it wasn't left to you, Fred," she reminded him, gently. "And I have been doing my best—after inquiry."

"Oh, I know," he said impatiently; "you've been got at by a lot of sentimentalists in London—faddists—slummers—popularity-hunters; and now, here in the Highlands, you have been working into the hands of those agitator fellows who are trying to stir up anarchy and rebellion everywhere; and you let yourself be imposed upon by a parcel of scheming and cunning crofters, who don't thank you, to begin with, and who would pull down this house to the ground and burn it the moment your back was turned if they dared."

"You haven't been very long in Lochgarra," said she, with much good humour, "but you seem to have used your time industriously. You know all about it——"

"Oh, it isn't only this place!" he said. "Everyone who reads the papers—who knows anything of the Highlands—is aware of what is going on. And you have allowed yourself to be taken in! For the credit of the family—for the sake of your own common sense—you might have waited a little. Here was Mr. Purdie, who knew the place, who knew the people; but you must needs take the whole matter in your own hands, and begin to throw away your money right and left, as if you had come into a dukedom! What do you suppose is the rental now—after all your abatements?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," said she. "But isn't it better to take what the people can really give you than nothing at all? You can't live on arrears? And, my dear Fred, what cause have you to grumble? The amount of rent affects me only; whereas I offer you the shooting and fishing, which has nothing to do with these matters. Why can't you amuse yourself and let me alone? What I have done I have considered. I have inquired into the condition of these people. To make rents practicable is not to throw away money. Indeed—but I am not going to discuss the question with you at all. Go away and get out your fly-book, and take Mr. Meredyth down to the Garra, and see if you can pick up a grilse before dinner."

But he was not to be put off by her bland amiability.

"Of course," said he, "it is very kind of you to offer me the fishing and the shooting; but I should have been better pleased to have had them without encumbrances."

"What do you mean?" said she.

"Why, who has the fishing and shooting here?" said he. "This poaching scoundrel, Ross. I am told the whole place is in league with him. He can do what he likes."

"And what further information did you gather at Inverness?" she asked,

rather contemptuously.

"Well, but look here, Mamie," he remonstrated, with a sense of his wrongs gaining upon him. "Consider the position you have put me in. You know how Frank is in request at this time of the year—a thundering good shot—and used to managing things about country-houses——"

"As well as leading cotillons in London," she interposed, with smiling eyes.

"And why not?" said he, boldly. "Oh, I suppose you consider that effeminate: you would rather have him living among rocks and caves, like this smuggling fellow, and shooting seagulls for his dinner? However, look at my position. I ask him to come down with me, at your suggestion. I tell him it isn't a grand shooting—and that he'll get more sea-trout than salmon in the river—but he comes all the same; and then we discover that the whole place is at the mercy of this idling blackguard of a fellow—if we get a few birds or find a pool undisturbed, it is with his sufferance——"

"So you have acquired all this information at Inverness?" said she. "But I wouldn't entirely trust it if I were you. I am afraid Mr. Purdie is rather prejudiced. He may have been exaggerating. However, if there is any truth in what he says, I'll tell you what you ought to do: ask Mr. Ross to join your shooting and fishing parties. You'll meet him to-night at dinner."

"Here—in this house?" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "Mamie, are you mad?"

"I hope not," she said quietly. "But Mr. Ross has been very kind to me of late, in helping me in various little ways; and as I couldn't well ask him to dinner when only Kate and I were in the house, I took the first opportunity after your arrival——"

"And so Frank and I, after being warned that the great annoyance and vexation we should find in the place is this fellow Ross, are coolly informed that we are to meet him at dinner, and I suppose we are expected to be civil to him!"

"I certainly do expect you to be civil to him," said Mary.

"Oh, but it's too bad!" he said, impatiently, and he went to the window and turned his back on her. And then he faced round again. "I wonder what Frank will think! I was almost ashamed to ask him to come here, even as it was—a small shooting, not much fishing, and the stalking merely a chance; but, all the same, he accepts; then the first thing we hear of on reaching Inverness is all about this vexation and underhand going on; and the next thing is that we are asked to meet at dinner the very person who causes all the trouble! Now, Mamie, I appeal to yourself, don't you think it is a little too hard?"

She hesitated. She began to fear she had been thoughtless—indiscreet—too much taken up with her own plans and projects.

"At all events, Fred," she pleaded, "your meeting Mr. Ross at dinner can't

matter one way or the other—and you will be able to judge for yourself. To me he does not seem the kind of young man you would suspect of spending his time in poaching; in fact, as I understand it, he is looking forward to being called to the Bar, and I should think he was busier with books than with cartridges or salmon flies."

"You are sure he said he would come to-night?" asked this young Fred Stanley, looking at his sister.

"Yes."

"Definitely promised?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't think he will."

"Why?"

"Because," said the young man, as he went leisurely towards the door, "there might be a question of evening dress. You haven't a Court tailor at Lochgarra, have you?"

Mary flushed slightly.

"I don't care whether he appears in evening dress or not," said she. "Most likely he will come along from his yacht; and a yachting suit is as good as any—in my eyes."

That evening, when the young hostess came downstairs, the large drawing-room was all suffused with a soft warmth of colour, for the sun was just sinking behind the violet-grey Atlantic, and the glory of the western skies streamed in through the several windows. Käthchen was here; and Käthchen's eyes lighted up with pleasure when she saw how Mary was attired. And yet could any costume have been simpler than this dress of cream-coloured China silk, its only ornamentation being a bunch of deep crimson fuchsias at the opening of the bodice, with another cluster of the same flowers at her belt? She wore no jewellery of any kind whatsoever.

"That is more like you, Mamie," said Käthchen, coming forward with a proud and admiring scrutiny. "I want Mr. Ross to see you in something different from your ordinary workaday things. And you look taller, too, somehow. And fairer—or is that the light from the windows?"

At this very moment the door was opened, and Mr. Ross was announced. Mary turned—with some little self-conscious expectation. And here was Young Donald of Heimra, in faultless evening dress; and there was a quiet look of friendliness in his eyes as he came forward and took the hand that was offered him. Käthchen said to herself: "Why is it that the full shirt-front and white tie suit dark men so well? And why doesn't he dress like that every evening?" For Käthchen did not know that that was precisely what Donald Ross had been in the habit of doing all the years that his mother and he had lived out in that remote island;

it was a little compliment he paid her; and she liked that bit of make-believe of ceremony in the monotony of their isolated life.

The new-comers who had arrived that afternoon were somewhat late; for they had gone down to the river to have a cast or two—a futile proceeding in the blazing sunlight; but presently they made their appearance, and were in due course introduced to Donald Ross. Käthchen, who was as usual a keen and interested observer, and who had heard of Fred Stanley's indignant protest, could not but admire the perfect good breeding he displayed on being thus brought face to face with his enemy. But indeed the ordinary every-day manner of a well-educated young Englishman—its curious impassivity, its lack of self-assertion—is a standing puzzle for foreigners and for Americans. What is the origin of it? Blank stupidity? Or a serene contempt for the opinion of others? Or a determination not to commit one's self? Or an affectation of having already seen and done everything worth seeing and doing? Anyhow, Fred Stanley's demeanour towards this stranger and intruder was perfect in its negative way; and so was that of his friend, though Frank Meredyth, by virtue of his superior years, allowed himself to be a little more careless and off-hand. However, there was not much time for forming surmises or jumping to conclusions; for presently dinner was announced.

"Mr. Meredyth, will you take in Miss Glendinning?" Mary said. "Fred, I'm sorry we've nobody for you." And therewithal she turned to Donald Ross, and took his arm, and these two followed the first couple into the dining-room. Young Ross sate at her right hand, of course; he was her chief guest; the others belonged to the house.

It was rather an animated little party; for if the Twelfth was as yet some way off, there were plenty of speculations as to what the Garra was likely to yield in the way of grilse and sea-trout. Käthchen noticed that Donald Ross spoke but little, and that they seldom appealed to him; indeed, Mr. Meredyth, professing to have met with unvarying ill-luck on every stream he had ever fished, was devising an ideal salmon-river on which the sportsman would not be continually exposed to the evil strokes of fate.

"What you want first of all," said he, "is to regulate the water-supply. At present when I go to a salmon-river, one of two things is certain to happen: either it's in roaring flood, and quite unfishable, or else—and this is the more common—it has dwindled away all to nothing, and you might as well begin and throw a fly over a pavement in Piccadilly. Very well; what you want is to turn the mountain-lochs into reservoirs; you bank up the surplus water in the hills; and then, in times of drought, when the river has got low, and would be otherwise unfishable, you send up the keepers to the sluices, turn on a supply, and freshen the pools, so that the fish wake up, and wonder what's going to happen. That is one thing.

Then there's another. You know that even when the water is in capital order, you may go down day by day, and find it impossible to get a single cast because of the blazing sunlight. That is a terrible misfortune; for you are all the time aware, as you sit on the bank, and hopelessly watch for clouds, that the fine weather is drying up the hills, and that very soon the stream will have dwindled away again. Very well; what you want for that is en enormous awning, that can be moved from pool to pool, and high enough not to interfere with the casting. By that means, you see, you could transfer any portion of a Highland stream into the land where it is always afternoon; and the fish, thinking the cool of the evening had already come, would begin to disport themselves and play with the pretty little coloured things that the current brought down. Look at the saving of time! Generally, in the middle of the day, there is a horrible long interval when nothing will move in a river. Whether it is the heat, or the sunlight, or the general drowsiness of nature, there's hardly ever anything stirring between twelve o'clock and four; and you lie on the bank, and consume a frightful amount of tobacco; and you may even fall asleep, if you have been doing a good deal of night-work in London. But if you have this great canvas screen, that can be stretched from the trees on one side to the poles on the other—very gradually and slowly, like the coming over of the evening—then the little fishes will begin to say to themselves, 'Here, boys, it's time to go out and have some fun,' and you can have fine sport, in spite of all the sunlight that ever blazed. However, I'm afraid you'd want the revenue of some half-a-dozen dukes before you could secure the ideal salmon-river."

"They're doing so many things with electricity now: couldn't you bring that in?" said Käthchen. "Couldn't you have an electric shock running out from the butt of the rod the moment the salmon touched the fly?"

But this was sheer frivolity. Frank Meredyth suddenly turned to young Ross and said—

"Oh, you can tell me, Mr. Ross—is the Garra a difficult river to fish?"

Now this was a perfectly innocent question—not meant as a trap at all; but Fred Stanley, whose mind had been brooding over the fact that the poacher was actually sitting at table with them, looked startled, and even frightened. Young Ross, on the other hand, appeared in no wise disconcerted.

"Really, I can hardly tell you," he said, "I am not much of a fisherman myself—there is no fishing at all on Heimra Island. But I should say it was not a very difficult river. Perhaps some of the pools under the woods—just above the bridge, I mean, where the banks are steep—might be a little awkward; but further up it is much opener; and further up still you come to long stretches where there isn't a bush on either side."

"Then, perhaps, you can't tell me what are the best sea-trout flies for this

water?" was the next question—with no evil intent in it.

"I'm afraid you would find me an untrustworthy guide," said Donald Ross. "If I were you I would take Hector's advice."

So there was an end of this matter—and Fred Stanley was much relieved. What he said to himself was this: "If that Spaniard-looking fellow is lying, he has a splendid nerve and can do it well. A magnificent piece of cheek—if it is so!"

On the whole, at this unpretentious little banquet, Frank Meredyth did most of the talking; and naturally it was addressed in the first place to Miss Stanley as being at the head of the table. He had had a considerable experience of country houses; he was gifted with a certain sense of humour; and he told his stories fairly well—Käthchen rewarding him now and again with a covert little giggle. As for Donald Ross, he sate silent, and reserved, and attentive. He was distinctly the stranger. Not that he betrayed any embarrassment, or was ill at ease; but he seemed to prefer to listen, especially when Mary Stanley happened to be speaking. For, indeed, more than once she let the others go their own way, and turned to him, and engaged him in conversation with herself alone. She found herself timid in doing so. If his manner was always most respectful—and even submissive—his eyes looked uncompromisingly straight at her, and they had a strange, subdued fire in them. When she happened to find his gaze thus fixed on her, she would suddenly grow nervous—stammer—perhaps even forget what she had been saying; while the joyous chatter of the other three at table went gaily on, fortunately for her. Sometimes she would think it was hardly fair of those others to leave her alone in this way: then again she would remind herself that it was she who was responsible for her guest.

It was not that he confused her by an awkward or obstinate silence; on the contrary, he answered her freely enough, in a gravely courteous way; but he seemed to attach too much importance to what she said—he seemed to be too grateful for this special attention she was bestowing upon him. And then again she dared hardly look up; for those black eyes burned so—in a timid, startled way—regarding her as if they would read something behind the mere prettiness of her face and complexion and hair, and apparently quite unconscious of their own power.

At last the ladies rose from the table; and Mary said—

"I suppose you gentlemen will be going out on the terrace to smoke? I wish you would let us come with you. I have not smelt a cigar for months—and it is so delicious in the evening air."

There was not very much objection. Chairs were brought out from the hall; Frank Meredyth perched himself on the stone parapet; the evening air became odorous, for there was hardly a breath of wind coming up from the bay. And as they sate and looked at the wide expanse of water—with only a chance remark

breaking the silence from time to time—it may have occurred to one or other of them that the summer twilight that lay over land and sea was growing somewhat warmer in tone. It was Mary who discovered the cause: the golden moon was behind them—just over the low, birch-crowned hill; and the pale radiance lay on the still water in front of them, and on the long spur of land on the other side of the bay, where there were one or two crofters' cottages and fishermen's huts just above the shore. And while they were thus looking abroad over the mystic and sleeping world, a still stranger thing appeared—a more unusual thing for Loch-garra, that is to say—certain moving lights out beyond the point of the headland.

"Look, Mary!" Käthchen cried. "But that can't be the steamer—she is not due till next Thursday!"

Whatever the vessel was, she was obviously making in for the harbour; for presently they could see both port and starboard lights—a red star and a green star, coming slowly into the still, moonlit bay.

"It is the *Consuelo*," Donald Ross said to Mary. "It is Lord Mount-Grattan's yacht: she has come down from Loch Laxford."

They watched her slow progress—this big dark thing stealing almost noiselessly into the spectral grey world; they saw her gradually rounding; the green light disappeared; there was a sudden noise of the reversal of the screw; then a space of quiet again; and at last the roar of the anchor. The rare visitor had chosen her position for the night.

Almost directly thereafter young Ross of Heimra rose and took leave of his hostess—saying a few words of thanks for so pleasant an evening. The others did not go indoors, however; the still, balmy, moonlight night was too great a temptation. They remained on the terrace, looking at the big black steam-yacht that now lay motionless on the silver-grey water, and listening for the occasional distant sounds that came from it.

But presently they saw a small boat put off from the shore, rowed by two men, with a third figure in the stern.

"That is Mr. Ross!" Käthchen exclaimed. "I know it is—that is his light overcoat."

"Can he be going away in the yacht?" Mary said suddenly.

"Not likely!" her brother struck in. "When you start off on a yachting cruise you don't go on board in evening dress." And then the young man turned to his male companion. "I say, Frank, don't you think that fellow was lying when he pretended not to know anything about the fishing in the Garra?"

It was an idle and careless question—perhaps not even meant to be impertinent; but Mary Stanley flamed up instantly—into white heat.

"Mr. Ross is—is a gentleman," she said, quite breathlessly. "And—he was my guest this evening—though you—you did not seem to treat him as such!"

Käthchen put her hand gently on her friend's arm.

"Mamie!" she said.

And Frank Meredyth never answered the question: this little incident—and a swift and covert glance he had directed towards the young lady herself—had given him something to think about.

CHAPTER V.

ON GARRA'S BANKS.

It soon became sufficiently evident that it was not solely for fishing and shooting that Mr. Frank Meredyth had come to Loch-garra; keepers, gillies, dogs, guns, fly-books occupied but little of his attention, while Mary Stanley occupied much; moreover, the zeal with which he prosecuted his suit was favoured by an abundance of opportunities. Indeed it must often have occurred to our country cousins—to those of them, at least, who have ventured to speculate on such dark mysteries—that courtship in a big and busy town like London must be a very difficult thing, demanding all kinds of subterfuges, plans, and lyings-in-wait. Or is it possible at all? they may ask, looking around at their own happy chances. The after-service stroll home on a Sunday morning, along a honeysuckle lane—the little groups of twos and threes getting widely scattered—is a much more secret and subtle thing than the crowded church-parade of Hyde Park, where every young maiden's features are being watched by a thousand amateur detectives. To sit out a dance is all very well—to take up a position on the staircase and affect to ignore the never-ending procession of ascending and descending guests; but it is surely inferior to the idle exploration of an old-fashioned rustic garden, with its red-brick walls and courts, its unintentional mazes, its leafy screens—while the tennis-lawn and the shade of trees, and ices and strawberries, hold the dowagers remote. And if these be the opportunities of the country, look at those of a distant sea-side solitude—the lonely little bays, the intervening headlands, the moonlight wanderings along the magic shores. Even in the day-time, when all this small world of Loch-garra was busy, there were many chances of companionship, of which he was not slow to avail himself. The Twelfth was not yet; the water in the Garra was far too low for fishing; what better could this young man do than go about with Mary Stanley, admiring her bland, good-natured ways, sympathising in her beneficent labour, and participating in it by the only method known to

him—that is to say, by the simple process of purchase? One consequence of all which was that he gradually became the owner of a vast and quite useless collection of home-shapen sticks, home-knitted stockings, homespun plaids, and what not; although, being only the younger son of a not very wealthy Welsh baronet, Frank Meredyth was not usually supposed to be overburdened with cash. But he said he would have a sale of these articles when he went south; and if there were any profit he would return it to Miss Stanley, to be expended as she might think fit.

The truth is, however, that Mary was far from encouraging him to accompany her on her expeditions; and would rather have had him go and talk to the keepers about the dogs. For one thing, she did not wish him to know how remote this little community still was from the Golden Age which she hoped in time to establish. For another, she was half afraid that those people whose obduracy she was patiently trying to overcome might suddenly say among themselves, "Oh, here are more strangers come to spy and inquire. And these are the fine gentlemen who have taken away the shooting and the fishing that by rights should belong to Young Donald. We do not want them here; no, nor the *Baintighearna* either; let her keep to her own friends. We do not wish to be interfered with; we are not slaves; when her uncle bought Lochgarra, he did not buy us." And thus it was that she did not at all approve of those two young men coming with her to the door of this or that cottage, standing about smoking cigarettes, and scanning everything with a cold and critical Saxon eye: she wished that the Twelfth were here, and that she could have them packed off up the hill out of everybody's way.

Meanwhile, what had become of Donald Ross of Heimra? Nothing had been heard or seen of him since the moonlight night on which they had watched him go out to the *Consuelo*; and next day the big steam-yacht left the harbour. Mary, though not saying much, became more and more concerned; his silence and absence made her think over things; sometimes Käthchen caught her friend looking out towards Heimra Island, in a curiously wistful way. And at last there came confession—one evening that Fred Stanley and Frank Meredyth had gone off on a stenlock-fishing expedition.

"I hope I am not distressing myself about nothing, Käthchen," Mary said, "but the more I think of it the more I fear——"

"What?"

"That something happened to offend Mr. Ross the evening he dined here. Oh, I don't mean anything very serious—any actual insult——"

"I should think not!" said Käthchen. "I thought he was treated with the greatest consideration. He took you in to dinner, to begin with. Then you simply devoted yourself to him all the evening——"

"But don't you think, Käthchen," Mary said—and she rose and went to the

window, evidently in considerable trouble—"don't you think that Fred and Mr. Meredyth—yes, and you, too—that you kept yourselves just a little too openly to yourselves—it was hardly fair, was it?"

"Hardly fair!" Käthchen exclaimed. "To leave you entirely to him? I wonder what young man would complain of that! I think he ought to be very grateful to us. If he had wished, he could have listened to Mr. Meredyth—who was most amusing, really; but as you two seemed to have plenty to say to each other—we could not dream of interfering——"

"But you never know how any little arrangement of that kind may be taken," Mary said, absently. "The intention may entirely be misunderstood. And then, brooding over some such thing in that lonely island may make it serious. I would not for worlds have him imagine that—that—he had not been well-treated. If you consider the peculiar circumstances—asked to a house that used to be his own—knowing he was to meet a nephew of my uncle—indeed I was not at all sure that he would come."

"Neither was I!" said Käthchen, with a bit of a laugh. "It was very generous of him, in my opinion: he must have had to make up his mind."

"Well, I will admit this," said Mary, with some colour mounting to her face, "that I put the invitation so that it would have been rather difficult for him to refuse—I—I asked him to come as a favour to myself. But that makes it all the worse if he has gone away with any consciousness of affront—and—and, as I say, brooding over it in that island would only deepen his sense of injury." She hesitated for a second or two, and then went on again, in a desperate kind of a way: "Why, for myself, the thinking over the mere possibility of such a thing has made me perfectly miserable. I don't know what to do, Käthchen, and that is the truth. If Fred and his friend weren't here I would go away out to Heimra—I mean you and I could go—so that I might see for myself why he has never sent me a line, or called. There must be something the matter. And as you say, it was a great concession to me—his coming to the house; and I can't bear the idea of anything having happened to give him offence."

"If you want to know," said the practical Käthchen, "why don't you get Fred to write and ask him over for a day's shooting?"

Mary was walking up and down: she stopped.

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully. "That might do—if Fred were a little reasonable. It would show Mr. Ross, at all events, that there was no wish to make a stranger of him."

Her two guests came home late; they had got into a good shoal of stenlock, and had been loth to give up. When they made their appearance they found supper awaiting them; and not only that, but the young ladies had let their dinner go by, in order to give them of their company; so they ought to have been in an

amiable mood.

"Where did you go, Fred?" Mary asked, as they took their places at table.

"Oh, a long way," said he. "We got Big Archie's boat, and then we had her towed by the steam-launch: we made first of all for the headlands south of Minard Bay."

"Then you would be in sight of Eilean Heimra most of the time?" she said, timidly.

"Oh, yes."

"You did not see any one coming or going from the island?" she continued, with eyes cast down.

"No; but we were not paying much heed. I can tell you, those big stenlock gave us plenty of occupation."

"It is rather odd we should have heard nothing of Mr. Ross," she ventured to say.

"He may have gone up to London," Mr. Meredyth put in, in a casual kind of fashion. "Didn't you say he is studying for the Bar? Then he must go up from time to time to keep his terms and eat his dinners."

"No, no—not just now," Fred Stanley interposed, and he spoke as one having authority, for he was himself looking forward to being called. "There's nothing of that sort going on at this time of year: the next term is Michaelmas—in November. My dear Frank, do you imagine that that fellow Ross would go away from Lochgarra at the beginning of August?—why, it's the very cream of the shooting!—a few days in advance of the legal time—the very pick of the year!—especially if you have a convenient little arrangement with a game-dealer in Inverness." Then he corrected himself. "No, I don't suppose he carries on this kind of thing for money; I will do him that justice; he doesn't look that kind of a chap. More likely malice: revenge for my uncle having come in and robbed him of what he had been brought up to consider his own: perhaps, too, the natural instinct of the chase, which is strong in some people, even when the law frowns on them."

"I will confess this," Frank Meredyth struck in (for he noticed that Mary was looking deeply vexed, and yet was too proud to speak), "that if I had been born the son of a horny-handed peasant—or more particularly still, the son of the village publican—I should have been an inveterate poacher. I can't imagine anything more exciting and interesting; the skill and cunning you have to exercise; the spice of danger that comes in; the local fame you acquire, when late hours and deep draughts lead to a little bragging. A poacher?—of course I should have been a poacher!—it is the only thing for one who has the instincts of a gentleman, and no money. And in the case of that young Ross, what could be more natural, with all the people round about recognising that that is the inalienable part of your inheritance? The land may have gone, and crops, and sheep, and what not: but

the wild animals—the game—the birds of the air—the salmon in the stream—they still belong to the old family—they were never sold."

"I beg your pardon—they were sold," said Fred Stanley, bluntly, "and whoever takes them in defiance of the law, steals: that's all about it."

"I dare say the lawyers could say something on behalf of that form of stealing," Frank Meredyth answered, good-naturedly, "only that they're all busy justifying the big stealings—the stealings of emperors, and statesmen, and financial magnates. However, I will admit this also: it is uncommonly awkward when you have poaching going on. It is an annoyance that worries. And you suspect everybody; and go on suspecting, until you can trust nobody; and you get disgusted with the whole place. Your abstract sympathy with the life of a poacher won't comfort you when you imagine that the moor has been shot over before you are out in the morning, and when you suspect the keepers of connivance. It isn't pleasant, I must say; indeed, it is a condition of affairs that can but rarely exist anywhere, for naturally the keepers are risking a good deal—risking their place, in fact——"

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Meredyth," Mary said at this point, with some emphasis. "Indeed, it is a condition of affairs that looks to me absurdly improbable. I should like to have some sort of definite proof of it before believing it. No doubt, there may be some such feeling as you suggest among the people—that Mr. Ross should still have the fishing and shooting: it is easy enough to believe that, when you find you cannot convince them that the land does not belong to him too; but it is quite another thing to assume that he takes advantage of this prevailing sentiment. However, in any case, isn't the remedy quite simple? Why shouldn't Fred ask him to go shooting with you? Surely there is room for three guns?"

"Oh," said Fred Stanley, with some stiffness, "if you wish to invite him to shoot on the Twelfth, very well. It is your shooting; it is for you to say. Of course, I did not understand when I left London that there was any stranger going to join the party, or I should have explained as much to Frank——"

"I am sure I shall be only too delighted, Miss Stanley," Frank Meredyth put in, quickly, "if any friend of yours should join us—quite delighted—naturally—another gun will be all the better. And when I spoke of the joys of poaching, I assure you it was without any particular reference to anybody: I was telling you what would be my own ambition in other circumstances. Fred will write to Mr. Ross——"

"I beg your pardon," said the young gentleman, with something of coldness. "Mamie, you'd better write yourself."

"Not if there is going to be any disinclination on your part," she said.

"Disinclination?" he repeated. "Well, the way I look at it is simply this: you

suspect that poaching is going on, and you ask the poacher to go shooting—why? Because you are afraid of him. It is a confession of weakness. What I would do, if the place were mine, is this: I'd send the keepers packing—and every man-jack of the gillies, too—until I knew I was master. It is perfectly preposterous that your own servants should connive at your being cheated—–"

"Doesn't that sometimes happen in other spheres of life?" Frank Meredyth asked—he was evidently bent on being pacificator.

"I don't know—I don't care," said young Stanley, stubbornly. "What I do know is that if Ross is to come shooting with us on the Twelfth, well, then, Mamie had better send him the invitation: I'm not hypocrite enough to do it."

So matters remained there for the present; but the very next evening a singular incident occurred which caused a renewal of this discussion—with its conflict of prejudices and prepossessions. All night there had been heavy and steady rain; in the morning the Garra had risen considerably; towards the afternoon it was discovered that the river was fining down again; whereupon Fred Stanley proposed to his friend and companion that they should go along as soon as the sun was likely to be off the water, and try for a grilse or a sea-trout in the cool of the twilight. They did not propose to take either gillie or keeper with them; they had found out which were the proper flies; and they would have greater freedom without professional supervision. So Frank Meredyth shouldered a grilse-rod of moderate length and weight; his companion took with him both landing-net and gaff; and together they walked along to the banks of the stream, passing through the village on their way.

They were rather too early; the sun was still on the pools; but they had the rod to put together, the casting-line to soak, the flies to choose. Then they sate down on the breckan, and cigarettes were produced.

"Don't you think my sister puts me into a very awkward position?" said the younger man, discontentedly.

"Why?" asked his companion—being discreet.

"Keeping up those friendly relations, or apparently friendly relations, with this fellow Ross," Fred Stanley said. "Wouldn't it be very much better, much honester, if we were declared enemies—as the people about here think we are? Then we could give fair notice to the keepers that they must either have him watched or they themselves must go. You see, my sister doesn't care what happens to the fishing or the shooting; but it is a shame she should be imposed upon; and a still greater shame that this fellow should come to the house, and pretend to be on friendly terms with her. You know, Frank, he must be a thundering hypocrite. Do you mean to tell me he has forgiven any one of our family for what my uncle did—you know what Mamie told you—draining the loch and pulling down the old castle? Of course he hasn't! And perhaps I don't blame him: it was too bad;

and that's a fact. But what I do blame him for is pretending to be on good terms; coming to the house; and so taking it out of our power to treat him as he ought to be treated—that is, as a person who is defying the law, whom we ought to try to catch. You see, Mamie is so soft; she hasn't that dimple in her cheek for nothing; she's far too good-natured; and this stuck-up Spaniard, or Portuguese, or whatever he is, seems to have impressed her because he looks mysterious and says nothing. Or perhaps she thinks that we have ill-treated him—that my uncle has, I mean. Or perhaps she hopes that through him she will get at those ill-conditioned brutes about here—you heard what Purdie said. I don't know; I can't make out women; they're not sufficiently aboveboard for the humble likes of me; but this I do know, that I should like to catch that fellow Ross red-handed, carrying a salmon or a brace of grouse, and then we should have it out!"

Frank Meredyth did not reply to this resentful little oration: he had been watching the westering sun, that was now slowly sinking behind the topmost trees of the steep bank on the other side of the river. And at length, when there was no longer a golden flash on the tea-brown ripples that came dancing over the shingle, he went down to the edge of the stream and began to cast, throwing a very fair line. But he was not very serious about it; in this rapid run there was little chance of anything beyond a sea-trout; he had his eye on a deeper, and smoother, and likelier pool lower down, where perchance there might be a lively young grilse lying, up that morning from the sea.

Then he called out—

"Come along, Fred, and take the next pool: it amuses me quite as much to look on."

"It amuses me more," the younger man said, taking out another cigarette. "You're throwing a beautiful line—go ahead—you'll come upon something down there."

And indeed Frank Meredyth now began to cast with more caution as he approached this smoother and deeper pool—sending his fly well over to the other side, letting it come gradually round with almost imperceptible jerks, and nursing it in the water before recovery. It was one of the best stretches of the river—they had been told that; and there was a fair chance after the rain. But all of a sudden, as he was carefully watching his fly being carried slowly round by the current, there was a terrific splash right in the midst of the stream: a large stone had been hurled from among the trees on the opposite bank: the pool was ruined. The fisherman, without a word, let his fly drift helplessly, and turned and looked at his companion. The same instant Fred Stanley had thrown away his cigarette, ran down the bank, and sprang into the water—careless of everything but getting across in time to capture their cowardly assailant. He had no waders on; but he did not heed that; all his endeavour was to force his way across the current before

their unseen enemy could have escaped from among those birches. Meredyth could do nothing but look on. The point at which his companion had entered the stream was rather above the pool, and shallower; but none the less there was a certain body of water to contend with; and out in the middle young Stanley, despite his arduous efforts, made but slow progress. Then there was the catching at the bushes on the opposite bank—a hurried scrambling up—the next second he had disappeared among the birch trees. Frank Meredyth laid down his rod, and quietly took out a cigarette: fishing in this kind of a neighbourhood did not seem to attract him any more.

It was some time before Fred Stanley came back: of course his quest had been unsuccessful—his hampered progress through the water had allowed his foe to get clear away.

"You see you were wrong, Frank," he said, with affected indifference, when he had waded across the stream again. "Our friendly neighbour hasn't gone south to keep the last of his terms, or for any other reason. A pretty trick, wasn't it? I knew there was a dog-in-the-manger look about the fellow; well, I don't care: Mamie can choose her own friends. As for you and me, we are off by the mail-car that leaves to-morrow morning."

He was simply wild with rage, despite all his outward calmness. Frank Meredyth looked very grave indeed.

"We can't do that, Fred," said he. "It would be an affront to your sister——"

"Well, then, and she allows my friend—her guest—to be insulted!" he exclaimed. "And all because no one dare speak out! But I've had enough of it. This last is too much—this shows you what the neighbourhood is like; and it is all to be winked at! As I say, I've had enough. I'm off. You can stay if you choose——"

"You know I can't stay here if you go," said Meredyth, in the same grave way: indeed, he did not at all like this position in which he found himself. And then he said: "Come, Fred, don't make too much of a trifle——"

"Do you call that a trifle?" the other demanded. "It is an indication of the spirit of the whole place; and more than that, it shows you the miserable, underhand enmity of this very fellow who has been pretending to make friends with my sister. It is not on my account—it is on your account—that I am indignant. I asked you to come here. This is pretty treatment, is it not?—and a pleasant intimation of what we may expect all the way through, if we stay on——"

"Of course we must stay on," said Meredyth. "I would not for anything have your sister vexed. I would not even tell her of what has just happened. Why should you? Neither you nor I care so much for the fishing——"

"That is not the point, Frank," said young Stanley. "Reel up—and we will go back to the house. I want Mamie to understand what all her pampering of this place has resulted in—nothing but miserable, underhand spite and enmity.

And if we do stop on, do you think I'd be frightened away from the fishing? Not if I had to get water-bailiffs up from Inverness, and give them each a double-barrelled breech-loader and a hiding-place in the woods. Pitching stones into salmon pools and then running away is a very pretty amusement; but that skulking and poaching thief would sing another tune if he were brought down by a charge of No. 6 shot!"

And he was in the same indignant mood whey they got back to Lochgarra House. He went straight to his sister. He told her the story—and in silence awaited her answer. What was it to be?—an excuse? an apology? a promise of inquiry and stricter government?

But for a second or two Mary Stanley was thoroughly alarmed. She recalled with a startling distinctness her own experience—her wandering up the side of the river—her coming upon the almost invisible poacher in the mysterious dusk of the twilight—the strange and vivid circles of blue-white fire on the dark surface of the stream whenever he moved—then his noiseless escape into the opposite woods; and she recalled, too, her own sudden suspicions as to who that ghostly fisherman was. Since then she had seen a good deal of Donald Ross, and she had gradually ceased to connect him in any way with that illegal haunting of the salmon-stream; but this new incident—following upon her brother's protests and remonstrances—frightened her, for one breathless moment. Then she strove to reassure herself. The young man who had sate by her side at dinner a few evenings ago—proud, reserved, and self-possessed, and yet timidly respectful towards herself and grateful for the attention she paid him—was not the kind of person to go spitefully throwing stones into a salmon-pool in order to destroy a stranger's fishing. It was absurd to think so!

"I am very sorry, Mr. Meredyth," said she, "that such a thing should have happened. It is a vexatious annoyance——"

"Oh, don't consider me, Miss Stanley!" said he, at once. "I assure you I don't mind in the least. I did not even wish to have it mentioned."

"It is annoying, though—very," she said. "It seems a pity that any one should have such ill-will——"

"But what are you going to do?" her brother demanded. "Sit tamely down and submit to this tyranny? And what will be the next thing?—trampling the nests in the spring, I suppose, so that there won't be a single grouse left on the whole moor. Then why shouldn't they help themselves to a sheep or two, when they want mutton for dinner, or go into the Glen Orme forest for a stag, if they prefer venison?"

Mary rang the bell; Barbara came.

"Barbara," said she, "send a message to Hector that I want to see him."

When the tall and bronze-complexioned keeper made his appearance—

looking somewhat concerned at this unusual summons—she briefly related to him what had occurred; and her tone implied that he was responsible for this petty outrage.

"I was offering," said Hector, in his serious and guarded way, "to go down to the ruvver with the chentlemen——"

"Yes, that is true enough," Fred Stanley broke in. "Hector did offer to go down with us. But surely it is a monstrous thing that we shouldn't be able to stroll along to a pool and have a cast by ourselves without being interfered with in this way. Come now, Hector, you must know who was likely to do a thing like that."

Hector paused for a moment, and then answered—

"Indeed, sir, I could not seh."

"Who is it who thinks the fishing in the Garra belongs to him, and is determined no one else shall have it? Isn't there anyone about with that idea in his head?" The question was put pointedly; it was clear what Fred Stanley meant; but there was no definite reply.

"There's some of the young lads they are fond of mischief," Hector said ambiguously. "And there's others nowadays that will be saying everyone has the right to fish."

"And perhaps that is your opinion, too," said Fred Stanley, regarding him.

"Oh, no, sir, not that at ahl," the keeper answered, simply enough. "But such things get into their heads, and sometimes they will be reading it from a newspaper, and the one talking to the other about what the Land League was saying at the meetings. The young lads they speak about new things nowadays amongst themselves."

"And I suppose they want to have the shooting, too?" Fred Stanley continued; "and if we don't give them the shooting they will go up the hill in the spring and trample the eggs?"

"Oh, no, sir, the shepherds are friendly with us," said Hector.

Mary interposed; for this badgering seemed to lead to nothing.

"Couldn't you get some old man to act as water-bailiff, Hector?—some old man to whom a small weekly wage would be a consideration."

"Oh, yes, mem, I could do that," said the keeper.

"And if there are any of those mischievous lads about, why, if he were to catch one of them, a little trip across to Dingwall might frighten the others, wouldn't it?"

"Just that, mem."

"There is old John at the inn—he seems to do nothing—does he know anything about the river?"

"Oh, yes, indeed—he was many a day a gillie," Hector made answer.

"Very well; see what wages he wants; and tell him that when he suspects there's any poaching going on, or any mischief of any kind, you and Hugh will give him a hand in the watching."

"Very well, mem."

And so the tall, bushy-bearded Hector was going away; but Fred Stanley stopped him. The young man's sombre suspicions had not been dissipated by those vague references to mischievous lads.

"Hector," said he, "is Mr. Ross of Heimra a keen fisherman?"

"I could not seh, sir," was Hector's grave and careful answer.

"Does he know the Garra well?"

"I could not seh, sir," Hector repeated.

"You don't happen to have seen or heard anything of him of late?"

"No, sir," said Hector; and then he added, "but I was noticing the yat coming over from Heimra this morning."

"Oh, really," exclaimed the young man, with a swift glance towards Frank Meredyth. "The yacht came over this morning? So Mr. Ross is in the neighbourhood?"

"Maybe, sir; but I have not seen him whatever."

That seemed to be enough for the cross-examiner.

"All right, Hector—thank you. Good evening!"

The head keeper withdrew; and Fred Stanley turned to his sister.

"I thought as much," said he. "I had a notion that Robinson Crusoe had come ashore from his desolate island. And no doubt he was very much surprised and disgusted to find two strangers intruding upon his favourite salmon pools—on the very first evening there has been a chance of a cast for some time. But he should not have allowed his anger to get the better of him; it was a childish trick, that flinging a stone into the water; a poor piece of spite—for one who claims to represent an old Highland family. Don't you think so, Mamie?"

Well, this at least was certain—that the *Sirène* had come across from Heimra, and was now lying in the Camus Bheag, or Little Bay. And the very next afternoon, as Mary Stanley and her friend Käthchen were seated at a table in the drawing-room busily engaged in comparing samples of dyed wool, the door was opened, and Barbara appeared.

"Mr. Ross, mem!" said Barbara.

CHAPTER VI.

A THREATENED INVASION.

Mary rose quickly, her clear eyes showing such obvious pleasure that Käthchen was inclined to be indignant. 'Mamie, have you no pride!' Käthchen said in her heart. 'It is not becoming in a young woman to be so grateful—for an ordinary piece of civility. And Mary Stanley of all people!' Well, Mary Stanley did not seem to be governed by any such considerations; she went forward to receive her visitor with the frankest smile of welcome lighting up her face; the magic-working dimple did its part.

"I am so glad you have called," said she, "for I was thinking of writing to you, and I was not sure whether you were at Heimra. We have not seen the yacht coming and going of late."

"No," said he, as he took the chair nearest her (and Käthchen remarked that his eyes, too, showed pleasure, if less openly declared), "I went down as far as Portree in the *Consuelo*—or I would have called before now. Did you want to see me about—about anything?"

And this question he asked with a curious simplicity and directness of manner. There was none of the self-consciousness of a young man addressing a remarkably pretty young woman. It was rather like an offer of neighbourly help: what trouble was she in now?

"I was wondering," she made answer, with a little timidity, "whether you would care to go out on the Twelfth with my brother and Mr. Meredyth. It is not a very grand shooting, as you know; but you would get some little amusement, I suppose; and Miss Glendinning and I would come and have lunch with you—if we were not in the way."

This ought to have been a sufficiently attractive invitation; but the observant Käthchen noticed that the young man hesitated.

"Thank you very much," said he; "it is most kind of you to have thought of me; but the fact is I'm not much of a shot, and I shouldn't like to spoil the bag. Of course, your brother will want to see what the moor can yield; and with fair shooting two guns should give a very good account of Lochgarra; so that it would be really a pity to spoil the Twelfth by bringing in a useless gun. Thank you all the same for thinking of me——"

"Oh, perhaps you don't care about shooting?" said Mary. "Perhaps you are fonder of fishing?"

And hardly were the words out of her mouth when some sudden recollection of that phantom poacher rushed in upon her mind; a hideous dread possessed her; how could she have been so unutterably indiscreet? Not only that, but there was yesterday's incident of the hurling of the stone into the salmon-pool: would

he imagine that she suspected him—that she was probing into a guilty knowledge? She was bewildered by what she had done; and yet determined to betray no consciousness of her blunder. A ghastly and protracted silence seemed to follow her question; but that was merely imagination on her part; he answered her at once—and that in the most natural manner, without a trace of embarrassment.

"I am a poor enough shot," said he, with a smile, "but I am even a worse fisherman. You see, there is hardly any shooting on Heimra Island, but there is still less fishing—none at all, practically. As for the shooting, there are some rabbits among the rocks, and occasionally I have seen a covey of grouse come flying across from the mainland; but the truth is, when you get used to the charm of quiet in a place like that, you don't want to have it broken by the banging of a gun——"

"Oh, no, of course not," said Mary, with a certain eagerness of assent—for she was overjoyed to find that nothing had come of her fancied indiscretion. "Of course not. I can quite imagine there must be a singular fascination in the solitariness of such an island, and the—the—silence. A fascination and a charm; and yet when Miss Glendinning and I have been up among the hills here, sometimes it has seemed too awful—too lifeless—it became terrible. Then out at Heimra—the sea being all round you in the night—and the bit of land so small—that must be a strange sensation; but perhaps you don't notice it as a stranger might; you must have got used to it——"

"Yes," said he, "it is very solitary and very silent. All the same," he added, rather absently, "I dare say I shall miss that very solitariness and silence when I go away from Heimra, as I hope to do ere long. I should not wonder if I looked back with some regret."

"Oh, you are going away from Heimra—and before long?" Mary repeated—and Käthchen glanced quickly at her.

"I hope so," he said. "Well, I would not trouble you with my schemes and plans, but for the fact that they indirectly concern you." She looked startled for a second; but he proceeded with a certain easy cheerfulness of manner which Käthchen thought became him; and he spoke in a confidential and friendly way, more than was his wont: "Yes; if what I am aiming at succeeds it will make your position here a good deal easier. I know the difficulties you have to contend with on an estate like this—the poverty of the soil—families growing up and marrying, and still clinging to the small homesteads—the distance from markets—the climate—and all that. And indeed my first scheme—my ideal scheme," he went on, in this frank kind of fashion, "was comprehensive enough: I wanted nothing less than to take away the whole of the population with me—not the surplus population merely, but the whole of the people bodily, leaving the sheep and the game in undisturbed possession. That would have made matters easy for you—and for

Mr. Purdie. I thought I could carry them away with me to one of the colonies; and get a grant of Crown Lands from the Government; and be appointed to look after the settlement, so that I could live and die among those I have known from my childhood. There was only one point of the scheme that I was absolutely sure about, and that was that the people would go if I asked them—yes, to the very oldest. 'If I have to be carried on board the ship,' one of them said to me——"

"Have you considered—the terrible responsibility?" she said, in rather a breathless way.

"Yes, indeed," said he, gravely. "And that comprehensive project was not practicable: it was too big—too visionary. But for some time back I have been making inquiries: indeed I went down to Portree chiefly to see one of the Committee who manage the Emigrants' Information Office—he is taking his holiday in Skye at present. And if in a more modest and reasonable way I could take a number of the people away with me, and found a little colony out in Queensland or in Canada, that would give you some relief, and make it easier for those remaining behind—would it not? North-Western Canada and Queensland—perhaps you know—are the only colonies that offer the immigrant a free homestead of 160 acres; and Canada is especially hospitable, for at all the ports there are Government agents, for the purpose of giving the immigrants every information and procuring them work. Oh, I am very well aware," he continued—seeing that she was silent and absorbed—"that emigration is not a certain panacea. There is no assurance that the emigrant is going to leave all his ills and troubles behind him. Very often the first generation have to suffer sore hardship; then the next reap the reward of their toil and perseverance. And home-sickness—well, plenty of them never get over that; and naturally, if they are home-sick, they exaggerate their sufferings and misfortunes." He sought in his pockets and brought out a letter. "Perhaps you would care to read that—I found it awaiting me when I came home this time."

She took the letter, and looked at it in rather a perfunctory way. It was clear that her mind was fixed on something quite different. Perhaps she was thinking of that distant settlement—out among the pines and snows of the North-West—or far away under the Southern Cross: the drafted people working with a right goodwill, and concealing their home-sickness, and making light of their hardships, so long as Young Donald was with them. Perhaps she was thinking of the denuded Lochgarra, and of the empty Eilean Heimra. After all, it was something to have a neighbour, even if he lived in that lonely island. And if she were doing her best with the people who remained—fostering industries, spreading education, bettering their condition in every way—well, there would be no one to whom she could show what she had done. What did her brother care for such things?—her brother was thinking only of grouse, and black-game, and

grilse. Frank Meredyth?—she more than suspected that his affectation of interest was only a sort of compliment paid to herself. And then there was another thing, more difficult to formulate; but away deep down in her heart somewhere there had sprung up a vague desire that some day or other she might be able to show Donald Ross how sorry she was for the injuries he had suffered at the hands of her family. When once a close and firm friendship had been established between them, he might be induced to forgive. But if he were going away, while as yet he and she were almost strangers? And she knew that the people who might remain with her at Lochgarra would say to themselves that she was the one who had driven Young Donald across the seas.

She forced herself to read the letter—

"Armadale, Minnesona, Canada.

"Mr. Ross of Heimra.—Sir,—Peter Macleod was showing me the letter you was writing to him, and asking about me, and he said it my duty to answer and give Mr. Ross the news. We have not much comfort here; I think the Lord was not pleased with us that we left our own country and come to America. My wife is very seeck; and while she has the seeckness on her I cannot go away and get railway work; and there are the five children, the oldest of them twelve, and not able to do mich. I have a cow that is giving mulk. I have a yoke of oxen. There is not a well; but I will begin at it soon. I have found a Lochgarra man, wan Neil Campbell, about five miles from here; it is a pleasure to me that I have the jance of speaking my own langwich. I have twelve tons of hay. The soil is good; but the weather verra bad; ay, until the end of May there was frost every night, and many's the time hailstones that would spoil the crop in half an hour. I bought ten bolls of meal forbye[#] the Government's supply; and if I had not had a little money I do not know what I would have done; and now the money is gone, and I cannot go away to work and leave my wife with the seeckness on her; and maybe if I did go away I would not get any work whatever. What to do now it is beyond me to say, and we are far away from any friends, my wife and me. When I went to Kavanagh to bring the doctor to my wife I was hearing the news from home that they believed I had brokken my leg. But it is not my legs that are brokken—it is my heart that is brokken. There has been no happiness within me since the day I left Loch Torridon and went away to Greenock to the steamer. That was a bad day for me and my family; we have had no peace or comfort since; it's glad I would be to see Ru-na-uag once more—ay, if they would give me a job at brekkin stones. This is all the news I am thinking of; and wishing Mr. Ross a long life and happiness, I am, your respectful servant,

"ANGUS MACKAY."

[#] Forbye—besides.

"Poor man!" said Mary. And then she looked up as she handed back the letter. "I should have thought," she continued, addressing Donald Ross, "that a report like that would have caused you to hesitate before recommending any more emigration. Was it you who sent that poor man out?"

"Oh, no," he answered at once; "that Angus Mackay lived at Loch Torridon—a long way south from here. I only got to know something of him accidentally. But mind you, Miss Stanley, I would not assume that even in his case emigration has been a failure. That letter is simply saturated with home-sickness. I should not be at all surprised to hear in a year or two that Angus was doing very well with his farm; and it is almost a certainty that when his family have grown up they will find themselves in excellent circumstances. Of course it is hard on him that his wife should be ill, especially with those young children—but these are misfortunes that happen everywhere."

"Emigration?" she repeated (and Käthchen could tell by her tone that this scheme of his found no favour in her sight). "So that is your cure for the poverty and discontent in the Highlands? But don't you think it is rather a confession of failure? Don't you think if the landlords were doing their duty there would be no need to drive these poor people away from their homes? No doubt, as you say, families grow up and marry, while the land does not increase; but look at the thousands upon thousands of acres that at present don't support a single human being——"

"You mean the deer-forests?" he said quite coolly (for the owner of the little island of Heimra had not much personal and immediate interest in the rights and duties of proprietors). "Yes; they say that is the alternative. They say either emigration or throwing open the deer-forests to small tenants and crofters—banishing the deer altogether, limiting the sheep-farms, planting homesteads. It sounds very well in the House of Commons, but I'm afraid it wouldn't work in practice. Such deer-forests as I happen to know are quite useless for any such purpose; the great bulk of the soil is impossible—rocks and peat simply; and then the small patches of land that might be cultivated—less than two acres in every thousand, they say—are scattered, and remote, and inaccessible. Who is to make roads, to begin with—even if the crofters were mad enough to imagine that they could send their handful of produce away to the distant markets with any chance of competition?"

But she was not convinced: a curious obstinacy seemed to have got hold of her.

"I can't help thinking," she repeated, "that emigration is a kind of cowardly remedy. Isn't it rather like admitting that you have failed? Surely there must be some other means? Why, before I came to Lochgarra I made up my mind that I would try to find out about the crofters who had gone away or been sent away, and I would invite them to come back and take up their old holdings."

"It would be a cruel kindness," said he. "And I doubt whether they would thank you for the offer. Yes, I dare say some would; and on their way back to their old home they would be filled with joy. When they came in sight of Ru-Minard I dare say they would be crying with delight; and when they landed at Lochgarra they would be for falling on their knees to kiss the beloved shore. But that wouldn't last long. When they came to look at the sour and marshy soil, the peat-hags, and the rocks, they would begin to alter their mind——"

"In any case," said she, "I have abandoned the idea for the present; I find I have already plenty on my hands. And I don't confess that I have failed yet. I am doing what I can. It is a very slow process; for they seem to imagine that whatever I suggest is for my own interest; at the same time, I don't see that I have failed yet. And as for emigration——"

"But, Miss Stanley," said he seriously, "you don't suppose I would take away any number of the people without your consent?"

At this she brightened up a little.

"Oh, it is only if there is a necessity? Only as a necessity, you mean?"

"Perhaps there is something of selfishness in it, too," he admitted. "Of course, I don't like the idea of living in Eilean Heimra all my life—not now: I am free from any duty; and—and perhaps there are associations that one ought to leave behind one. And if I could get some post from the Government in connection with this emigration scheme—if I could become the overseer of the little settlement—I should still be among my own people: no doubt that has had something to do with my forecasts——"

"But at all events," she interposed, quickly, "you won't be too precipitate? It is a dreadful responsibility. Even if they exaggerate their hardships through home-sickness, that is not altogether imaginary: it is real enough to them at the time. And if actual suffering were to take place——"

"I know the responsibility," he said. "I am quite aware of it. All that I could do would be to obtain the fullest and most accurate information; and then explain to the people the gravity of the step they were about to take. Then it is not a new thing; there are quite trustworthy accounts of the various colonial settlements; and this evidence they would have to estimate dispassionately for themselves."

"Mr. Ross!" she remonstrated. "How can you say such a thing! You told

me just now that the whole of those people would follow you away to Canada or Australia if you but said the word. Is that a fair judgment of evidence? I don't think you could get rid of your responsibility by putting a lot of Bluebooks before them——"

"I see you are against emigration," he said.

"It may be necessary in some places—I don't know yet that it is here," she answered him. "I would rather be allowed to try." And then she said—looking at him rather timidly—"If you think I have not given them enough, I will give them more. There is no forest land, as you know; but—but there is some more pasture that perhaps Mr. Watson might be induced to give up. I have given them Meall-na-Cruagan; if you wish it, I will give them Meall-na-Fearn. Mr. Watson was most good-natured about Meall-na-Cruagan; and I dare say there would be no difficulty in settling what should be taken off his rent if he were to give up Meall-na-Fearn and Corrie Bhreag. And—and there's more than that I would try before having people banished."

Kate Glendinning observed that this young man changed colour. It was an odd thing—and interesting to the onlooker. For usually he was so calm, and self-possessed, and reserved: submissive, too, so that it was only at times that he raised his keen black eyes to the young lady who was addressing him: he seemed to wish to keep a certain distance between them. But these last words of hers appeared to have touched him. The pale, dark face showed a sense of shame—or deprecation.

"You must not imagine, Miss Stanley," said he, "that I came to ask for anything. You have already been most generous—too generous, most people would say. It would be imposing on you to ask for more; it would be unfair; if I were in your position, I would refuse. But I thought my scheme might afford you some relief——"

"And if you went away with them, what would you do with Heimra Island?" she said, abruptly—and regarding him with her clear, honest eyes.

"That I don't know," said he, "except that I should be sorry to sell it. And it would not be easy to let it, even as a summer holiday place. There is no fishing or shooting to speak of; and it is a long way to come. For a yachtsman it might make convenient headquarters——"

"But you would not sell the island?" she asked again.

"Not unless I was compelled," he made answer. "I might go away and leave it for a time—the letting of the pasture would just about cover the housekeeper's wages and the keeping up of the place; and then, years hence, when my little community in Australia or Canada was all safely established—when the heat of the day was over, as they say in the Gaelic—I might come back there, and spend the end of my life in peace and quiet. For old people do not need many friends

around them: their recollections are in the past."

And then he rose.

"I beg your pardon for troubling you about my poor affairs."

"But they concern me," she said, as she rose also, "and very immediately. Besides that, we are neighbours. And so I am to understand that you won't do anything further with your emigration scheme—not at present?"

"Nothing until you consent—nor until you are quite satisfied that it is a wise thing to embark on. And indeed there is no great hurry: I can't keep my last term until November next. But by then I hope to have learnt everything there is to be learned about the various emigration-fields."

She rang the bell; but she herself accompanied him to the door, and out into the hall.

"By the way," said she, "what has become of Anna Chlannach?—I thought you were to tell her to come to me, so that I could assure her she shouldn't be locked up in any asylum?"

"I'm afraid Anna has not got over her fear of you," said he, with a smile. "She seems to think you tried to entrap her into the garden, where Mr. Purdie was. And it isn't easy to reason with Anna Chlannach."

"Oh, then, you see her sometimes?" she asked.

"Sometimes—yes. If Anna catches sight of the *Sirène* coming across, she generally runs down to Camus Bheag, and waits for us, to ask for news from the island."

"Will you tell her that I am very angry with her for not coming to see me—when Barbara could quite easily be the interpreter between us?"

"I will. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said she, as he left.

But she did not immediately go back to the drawing-room, and to Käthchen, and the dyed wools. She remained in the great, empty oak hall, slowly walking up and down—with visions before her eyes. She saw a name, too: it was *New Heimra.* And the actual Heimra out there—the actual Heimra would then be deserted, save, perhaps, for some old housekeeper, who would sit out in the summer evenings, and wonder whether Young Donald was ever coming back to his home. Or perhaps an English family would be in possession of that bungalow retreat: the children scampering about with their noisy games: would they be silent a little, when chance brought them to the lonely white grave, up there on the crest of the hill?

She was startled from her reverie by some sound on the steps outside, and, turning, found her brother and Frank Meredyth at the door.

"Now, Mamie, see what comes of all your coddling!" Fred Stanley exclaimed as he came forward, and he held a piece of paper in his hand. "This is a pretty

state of affairs! But can you wonder? They easily find out where the place is ripe for them—where the people have been nursed into insolence and discontent—and on the Twelfth, too—oh, yes, the Twelfth!—when they expect the keepers to be up on the hill, so they'll be able to break a few of the drawing-room windows on their way by——"

"What are you talking about?" she said, in answer to this incoherent harangue; and she took the paper from him. It was a handbill, rather shabbily printed; and these were the contents:—

THE HEATHER ON FIRE!

THE HEATHER ON FIKE!

The Land for the People!—Away with Sheep, Deer, and Landlords!—The Landlords must go!—Compulsory Emigration for Landlords!—Men of the Highlands, stand up for your rights!—Down with Southern Rack-Renters!

To THE
TENANTS, CROFTERS, AND COTTARS OF
LOCHGARRA AND NEIGHBOURHOOD:
A PUBLIC MEETING

Will be held in Lochgarra Free Church, on Monday the 12th of August, at one o'clock. Addresses by Mr. JOSIAH OGDEN, M.P., Miss ERNESTINE SIMON, of Paris, and Mrs. ELIZABETH JACKSON NOYES, of the Connecticut Council of Liberty. Mr. JOHN FRASER, Vice-President of the Stratherrick Branch of the Highland Land League, will preside.

ADMISSION FREE.

Men of Lochgarra!—attend in your hundreds:

"Who would be free themselves must strike the blow!"

Well, Mary was not the least bit frightened.

"I don't see why they shouldn't hold a public meeting," said she, as she handed him back the bill.

"Why, there will be a public riot!" he said. "You haven't seen the great placards they have pasted up on the walls—done with a big brush—I suppose they were afraid to print them; but if you go down through the village you will see what they're after. '*Sweep the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn*'—'*Take back the land*'—'*A general march into Glen Orme*.'"

"Glen Orme deer-forest has nothing to do with me," she said.

"Do you think they will draw such fine distinctions?" he retorted. "I can

tell you, when once the march has begun, they won't stop to ask whose fences they are tearing down; and a shot or two fired through your windows is about the least you can expect. And that is what comes of coddling people: they think they can terrorise over you whenever they choose—they welcome any kind of agitator, and think they're going to have it all their own way. And can't you see who suggested the Twelfth to them? I'll bet it was that fellow Ross—a clever trick!—either we lose the opening day of the shooting—and that would make him laugh like a cat—or else we leave the place free for those parading blackguards to plunder at their will."

"At all events, Miss Stanley," interposed Frank Meredyth, in a calmer manner, "there can be no harm in postponing our grouse shooting until the Tuesday. I think it will be better for Fred and myself to be about the premises—and the keepers too—until this little disturbance has blown over."

"Who are those people?" she said, taking back the paper and regarding it. "Mr. Ogden I know something of—mostly from pictures of him in *Punch*; but I thought it was strikes and trade unions in the north of England that he busied himself with. What has brought him to Scotland?"

"Why, wherever there is mischief to be stirred up—and notoriety to be earned for himself—that is enough for a low Radical of that stamp!" her brother said. He was a young man, and his convictions were round and complete.

"And Miss Ernestine Simon—-who is she?"

"Oh, you don't know Ernestine?" said Frank Meredyth, with a smile. "Oh yes, surely! Ernestine, the famous *pétroleuse*, who fought at the Buttes Chaumont and got wounded in the scramble through Belleville? You must have heard of her, surely! Well, Ernestine is getting old now; but there is still something of the sacred fire about her—a sort of *mouton enragé* desperation: she can use whirling words, as far as her broken English goes."

"And Mrs. Noyes?" Mary continued. "Who is Mrs. Jackson Noyes, from Connecticut?"

"There I am done," he confessed. "I never heard of Mrs. Jackson Noyes in any capacity whatever. But I can imagine the sort of person she is likely to be."

"And what do those people know about the Highlands?" Mary demanded again.

"What they have been told by the Land League, I suppose," was his answer—and therewithal Miss Stanley led the way back to the drawing-room, to carry these startling tidings to Kate Glendinning.

But she was very silent and thoughtful all that evening; and when the two gentlemen, after dinner, had gone out on the terrace to smoke a cigar, she said—

"Käthchen, I am going to confide in you; and you must not break faith with me. You hear what is likely to happen next Monday. Very well: Mr. Meredyth

and Fred both want to remain about the house, along with the keepers, in case there should be any disturbance, any injury done to the place. Now I particularly wish that they should not; and you must back me up, if it is spoken of again. Why, what harm can the people do? I don't mind about a broken window, if one of the lads should become unruly in going by. And if they drive the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn, the sheep can be driven back the next day. I will warn Mr. Watson that he must not allow his men to show resistance. But, above all, I am anxious that Fred and Mr. Meredyth should leave in the morning for their shooting, as they had arranged. For the truth is, Käthchen, I mean to go to this meeting; and I mean to go alone."

"Mamie!" Käthchen exclaimed, with dismay in her eyes.

"There are many reasons," Mary Stanley went on. "If those strangers know anything about the condition of the Highlands that I do not know, I shall be glad to hear it. If they have merely come to stir up mischief, I wish to make my protest. But there is more than that: perhaps the people about here have their grievances and resentments that they would speak of more freely at such a meeting; and if they have, I want to know what they are; and I want to show that I am not afraid to trust myself among my neighbours, and to listen to what they have got to say. For, after all, Käthchen, the more you think of it, the more that emigration scheme—the drafting of a lot of people from their own homes—seems such a complete confession of failure. I would rather try something else first—or many things—rather than have the people go away to Canada or Queensland."

"Mamie," said Käthchen, rising to her feet, "I will not allow you to thrust yourself into this danger. You don't know what an excited crowd may not do. You are the representative here—the only representative—of the very class whom these strangers have come to denounce."

"That is why I mean to go and show them that the relations between landlord and tenant need not necessarily be what they imagine them to be," Mary said, with a certain dignity and reserve. "Why, if there is any risk of a serious disturbance, is it not my place to be there, to do what I can to prevent it?"

"I will appeal to Mr. Meredyth," said Käthchen.

"You cannot," said Mary, calmly. "I have entrusted you with my secret—you cannot break faith."

Käthchen looked disconcerted for a second.

"It is quite monstrous, Mamie, that you should expose yourself to such a risk. Is it because you are so anxious Mr. Ross should not take away a lot of the people to Canada—and you want them to declare openly that they are on good terms with you? At all events, you shall not be there alone. I will go with you."

"It is quite needless, Käthchen!"

"I don't care about that," said Kate Glendinning; and then she added, vin-

dictively: "and when I get hold of that Mr. Pettigrew, I will give him a bit of my mind! The man of peace—always sighing and praying that people should live together in *ahmity*—and here he goes and lends his church to these professional mischief-makers. Wait till I get hold of Mr. Pettigrew!"

CHAPTER VII.

"KAIN TO THE KING THE MORN!"

The night was dark and yet clear; the sea still; not a whisper stirred in the birch-woods nor along the shores; the small red points of fire, that told of the distant village, burned steadily. And here, down near the edge of the water, were Coinneach and Calum-a-bhata, hidden under the shadow of the projecting rocks.

"Oh, yes, Calum," the elder sailor was saying in his native tongue—and he spoke in something of an undertone—"maybe we will get a few sea-trout this night; and a good basket of sea-trout is a fine thing to take away with us to Heimra; and who has a better right to the sea-trout than our master? Perhaps you do not know what in other days they used to call *Kain*; for you are a young man, and not hearing of many things; but I will tell you now. It was in the days when there were very good relations between the people and the proprietors—"

"When the birds sang in Gaelic, Coinneach!" said Calum.

"Oh, you may laugh; for you are a young man, and ignorant of many things; but I tell you there was that time; and the tenants and the people at the Big House were very friendly. And the tenants they paid part of their rent in things that were useful for the Big House—such things as hens, and butter, and eggs, and the like; but it was not taken as rent; not at all; it was taken as a present; and the people at the Big House they would have the tenant sit down, and drink a glass of whisky, and hear the news. And now do you understand that there's many a one about here knows well of that custom; and they may pay their money-rent to the English family; but they would rather send their *Kain* to the old family, that is, to our master; and that is why the Gillie Ciotach and the rest of them are very glad when they can take out a hare or a brace of birds or something of that kind to Heimra. And why should not the sea pay *Kain* to Donald Ross of Heimra?—I will ask you that question, Calum. If the sea about here belongs to any one, it belongs to the old family, and not to the English family——"

"But if they catch us with the scringe-net, Coinneach?" said the younger

man, ruefully. "Aw, *Dyeea*, I was never in a prison."

"The scringe-net!—a prison!" said Coinneach with contempt. "How little you know about such things! Do they put the dukes and the lords in prison that come round the coast in their big yachts? and in nearly every one of the yachts you will see a scringe-net hung out to dry, and no one concealing it. Do you think I have no eyes, Calum? When the *Consuelo* came round to Camus Bheag, and the master was sending to us for his other clothes before he went away to the south, did I not see them taking down a scringe-net from the boom? It is very frightened you are, Calum, whether it is putting a few kegs into a cave, or putting a scringe-net round a shore. Now if there was something really to frighten you—like the card-playing the young man saw——

"What was that, Coinneach?" said Calum quickly.

Conneach paused for a second or two, and his face became grave and thoughtful.

"That was enough to frighten anyone," he continued presently—in this mysterious chillness, while he kept his eyes watching the vague, dark plain that lay between him and the distant lights of the village. "And if I tell you the story, Calum, it is to show you there are many things we do not understand, and that it is wise not to speak too confidently, in case someone might overhear—someone that we cannot see. For sometimes they show themselves; and at other times they are not visible; but *they may be there.* Now I must tell you it happened in a great castle in the north; I am not remembering the name of it; maybe it was up in Caithness; I am not remembering that; but the story is well known, and I was hearing that someone was putting it in a book as well. Now I must tell you that the owner of the castle is the head of the clan, and of a very old and great family; and it is the custom, whenever he goes away from home, that one of the other gentlemen of the clan goes to the castle to keep watch. It is not needful in these days, as you can guess for yourself; but it is a compliment to the head of the clan, and an old custom; and maybe it is kept up to this present time—though I am not swearing that to you, Calum. What I am telling you took place a good many years ago; that is what I have heard; maybe sixty years, maybe fifty years, maybe a hundred years; I am not swearing to that. But the chief had to go away from home; and according to the custom, one of the gentlemen went to keep watch; and he took with him a young country lad, one of his own servants. Now I must tell you there was a fire put in the great hall of the castle; for it was in the winter time; and they had to sit up all night, the one keeping the other awake—for no one likes to be left alone in a strange place like that, in the night-time, and not knowing what things have been experienced by others."

"You are not needing to tell me that, Coinneach," the other assented.

"Very well. But as I was saying, the master he sate close to the fire in the

great hall; and the young man he remained some distance away, by one of the windows; and there was no speaking between them. So one hour after another hour went by; and there was nothing happening; and it was not until the dead of the night, or towards the morning, that the young man noticed that his master had fallen asleep. He did not like that, I can tell you, Calum; for if you are left alone, the evil beings may appear and come upon you; and there is no question about it. Very well. The young man he thought he would go over to the fire and waken his master; but what do you think of this now, Calum, that when he tried to rise from his seat he could not do that—something was holding him back—he tried seven times over and seven times more, as I have heard, for he was trembling with the fear of being held. And then—what do you think of this, Calum?—and it is the truth I am telling you—he saw what few men have ever seen, and what few would ever wish to see: the folding-doors at the end of the hall were opened wide; and there were two footmen bringing in lights; and then there was a procession of ladies and gentlemen all dressed in a way that was strange to him; and they came into the hall so that you could not hear a sound. They took no notice of him or his master; and he could see everything they were doing, for all that his eyes were starting out of his head with fright; and I tell you he was so terrified he could not cry out to wake his master. But he was watching—oh, yes, he was watching with all his eyes, you may be sure of that; and he saw the footmen bring forward the tables; and those people in the strange clothes sate down and began to play at cards; and they were talking to each other—but never any sound of their talking. He could see their lips moving; but there was no sound. What do you think of that now, Calum?—was it not a dreadful thing for a young man to see?—even if they were not doing him any harm, or even knowing he was there? There's many a one would have sprung up and shrieked out; but as I tell you, there was no strength in his bones and he could not move; and his master was fast asleep; and all those people—the gentlemen with their small swords by their side, and the ladies in their silks—they were playing away at the cards, and talking to each other across the table, and not a sound to be heard. He watched and watched—aw, God, I suppose he was more dead than alive with trembling, and not being able to call on his master—until the windows began to grow grey with the morning light; and then he saw that the people were sometimes looking at the windows, and sometimes at each other, and they were talking less. Then they rose; and he could not see the candles any more because of the light in the hall; and they were going away in that noiseless manner, when one of them happened to spy the young man; and he came along and looked at him. He looked at him for a moment—and seemed to breathe on him—so that it was like a cold air touching him—and the young man knew that the hand of death had been put upon him. There was no sound; the strange person only looked; and the young man felt the

cold air on his forehead, so that he was for sinking to the floor; for he thought that death was on him already, and that he must go with them wherever they were going. Calum, I have told you what I felt when I was coming back from Ru Grobhar, and when the Woman came behind me; it was like that with the young man, as I have heard. And then all of a sudden a cock crew outside; and his master woke up and looked round; and there was no one in the hall but their two selves."

"Did he cry out then?—did he tell his master what he had seen?" Calum asked, in a low voice.

"He was not caring much to tell any one," Coinneach replied. "It was what he felt within him that concerned him; and he knew that the touch of death had been put upon him. Oh, yes, he told the story, though they found him so weak that he could not say much; and they put him to bed—but he was shivering all the time; and he had no heart for living left in him. He was not caring to speak much about it. When they asked him what the people were like, he said the gentlemen had velvet coats, and white hair tied with black ribbons behind; and the ladies were rich in their dresses; but he could not say what language they were speaking, for he could see their lips moving, but there was no sound. He was not caring to speak much about it. The life seemed to have been taken out of his body; he said he would never rise again from his bed. He said more than once, 'It was that one that breathed on me; he wanted me to go with them to be one of the servants; and if the cock had not crowed I would have gone with them. But now I am going.' And he got weaker and weaker, until about the end of the third day; and then it was all over with the poor lad; and there was no struggle—he knew that the death-touch had been put upon his heart."

"And I suppose now," said Calum, meditatively, "they will have him bringing in the tables for them every time they come to play cards in the middle of the night. Aw, *Dyeea*, I know what I would do if I was the master of that place: I would have the keepers hidden, and when those people came in I would have three or four guns go off at them all at once: would not that settle them?"

"You are a foolish lad, Calum, to think you can harm people like that with a gun," said Coinneach. "No, if it was I, I would say the Lord's Prayer to myself, very low, so that they could not hear; and if they did hear, and still came towards me, I would cry out, 'God on the cross!'—and that would put the people away from me, as it made the Woman take her hands from my throat the dreadful night I was coming by the Black Bay."

"Ay, but tell me this, Coinneach," said the younger of the two men. "I have heard that in great terror your tongue will cleave to your mouth; and you cannot cry out. And what is to happen to you then, if one of those people came near to put a cold breath on you?"

Coinneach did not answer this question: for the last few seconds he had been carefully scanning the darkened plain before him.

"The boat is coming now, Calum," he whispered. "And it is just as noiseless as any ghost she is." And with that the two men got up from the rock on which they had been sitting, and went down to the water's edge, where they waited in silence.

There was a low whistle; Coinneach answered it. Presently a dark object became dimly visible in the gloom. It was a rowing-boat; and as she slowly drew near the prow sent ripples of phosphorescence trembling away into the dusk, while the blades of the muffled oars, each time they dipped, struck white fire down into the sea. It looked as if some huge and strange creature, with gauzy silver wings, was coming shoreward from out of the unknown deeps. Not a word was uttered by anyone. When the bow of the boat came near Coinneach caught it and checked it, so that it should not grate on the shingle. Then he and his companion tumbled in; two other oars, also muffled, were put in the rowlocks; and silently she went away again, under the guidance of a fifth man, who sate at the helm. Very soon the lights of Lochgarra were lost to view; they had got round one of the promontories. Out to seaward there was nothing visible at all; while the 'loom' of the land was hardly to be distinguished from the overhanging; heavens that did not show a single star.

And yet the steersman seemed to be sufficiently sure of his course. There was no calling a halt for consultation, nor any other sign of uncertainty. Noiselessly the four oars kept measured time; there were simultaneously the four sudden downward flashes of white—followed by a kind of seething of silver radiance deep in the dark water; then, here and there on the surface, a large and lambent jewel would shine keenly for a second or two, floating away on the ripples as the boat left it behind. Not one of the men smoked: that of itself showed that something unusual was happening. They kept their eyes on the sombre features of the adjacent shore—of which a landsman could have made next to nothing; or they turned to the dimly-descried outline of the low range of hills, where that could be made out against the sky. It was a long and monotonous pull—with absolute silence reigning. But at length a whispered "Easy, boys, easy!" told them that this part of their labour was about over; and now they proceeded with greater caution—merely dipping the tips of their oars in the water, while all their attention was concentrated on the blurred and vague shadows of the land.

They were now in a small and sheltered bay, the stillness of which was so intense that they could distinctly hear the murmur of some mountain burn. On the face of the hill rising from the sea there were certain darker patches—perhaps these were birch-woods: also down by the shore there were spaces of deeper gloom—these might be clumps of trees. No light was visible anywhere:

this part of the coast was clearly uninhabited, or else the people were asleep. And yet, before venturing nearer, they ceased rowing altogether; and watched; and listened. Not a sound: save for that continuous murmur of the stream, that at times became remote, and then grew more distinct again—as some wandering breath of wind passed across the face of the hill. The world around them lay in a trance as deep as death: the bark of a dog, the call of a heron, would have been a startling thing. Meanwhile two of the oars had been stealthily shipped; the remaining two were sufficient to paddle the boat nearer to the rocks, when that might be deemed safe.

And at last the steersman, who appeared to be in command, gave the word. As gently as might be, the boat was headed in for the shore, until Coinneach, who was up at the bow, whispered "That'll do now;" the rowing ceased; there was a pause, and some further anxious scrutinising of that amorphous gloom; then two black figures stepped over the side into the water, taking with them the lug-line of the net that was carefully arranged in the stern. They were almost immediately lost sight of; for the boat was again noiselessly paddled away, until the full length of the line was exhausted; while he in the stern began to pay out the net—each cork float that dropped into the water sending a shower of tremulous white stars spreading from it, and all the meshes shivering in silver as they were straightened out. A wonderful sight it was; but not the most likely to procure a good fishing; for, of course, that quivering, lustrous, far-extended web would be visible at some little distance. However, out went the net easily and steadily—with just the faintest possible "swish" as each successive armful soused into the sea; and then, as quick as was consistent with silence, the boat was pulled ashore, and two of the men jumped out with the other lug-line. They, too, vanished in the impenetrable dusk. The solitary occupant of the mysterious craft, standing up at the bow, was now left to watch the result of these operations and to direct, in low and eager whispers, his unseen comrades. Slowly, slowly the semicircular net was being hauled in; as it got nearer and nearer the men at the lug-lines splashed the water with them, so as to frighten the fish into the meshes; the sea glimmered nebulous in white fire; here and there a larger star burned clear on the black surface for a moment, and then gradually faded away. The commotion increased—in the water and out of it; it was evident from the fluttering and seething that there was a good haul; and in their excitement the scringers who were ashore forgot the danger of their situation—there were muttered exclamations in Gaelic as the net was narrowed in and in. And then, behold!—in the dark meshes those shining silver things—each entangled fish a gleaming, scintillating wonder—a radiant prize, here in the deep night. If this was *Kain* for Donald Ross of Heimra, it was *Kain* fit to be paid to a king.

It was at this moment that three men came across the rocky headland

guarding the bay on its northern side. They had just completed a careful inspection of the neighbouring creek—as careful as the darkness would allow; they had followed the windings of the coast, searching every inlet; and so far their quest had been in vain. Now they stood on this promontory, peering and listening.

"No, sir, I do not see or hear anything," said Hector, the tall keeper, who had a gun over his shoulder; and he seemed inclined to give up further pursuit.

"But I tell you they must be somewhere," said Fred Stanley, in an excited fashion. "There was no mistake about what they were after. What would they be going out in a boat for at this time of the night, if it wasn't for scringeing?"

"Maybe they would be for setting night-lines," said the keeper, evasively.

"Not a bit of it!" the young man retorted with impatience. "I know better than that. And I know who is in that boat—I know perfectly well. It isn't for nothing that the *Sirène* is lying in Camus Bheag: I know who is out with those poaching nets—and I'm going to catch him if I can. I want to have certain things made public: I want an explanation: I want to have the Sheriff at Dingwall called in to settle this matter."

"Are you quite sure you saw the boat, sir?" said the keeper—all this conversation taking place in lowered tones, except when Fred Stanley grew angry and indignant.

"Why," said he, turning to his friend Meredyth, "how far was she from the steam-launch when she passed—not half a dozen yards, I'll swear! It was a marvellous stroke of luck we thought of going out for that draught-board; they little thought there would be any one on the launch at that hour; and I tell you, if the punt had been a bit bigger, I would have given chase to them there and then. Never mind, we ought to be able to catch them yet—catch them in the act—and I mean to see it out——"

"Yes, but we haven't caught them," said Frank Meredyth, discontentedly; for he had stumbled again and again, and knocked his ankles against the rocks; and he would far rather have been at home, talking to Mary Stanley. "And it's beastly dark: we shall be slipping down into the water sooner or later. What's the use of going on, Fred? What about a few sea-trout? Everybody does it——"

"But it's against the law all the same; and I mean to catch this poaching scoundrel red-handed, if I can," was the young man's answer. "Come, Hector, you must know perfectly well where they put out the scringe-nets. What's this place before us now?"

"It's the Camus Mhor, sir," said Hector, "in there towards the land."

"Well, is it any use scringeing in this bay?" the young man demanded.

"There's the mouth of the burn that comes down by the plantation," was the reply.

"Very well, take us there!" Fred Stanley said, impatiently. "Those fellows

must be somewhere; and I'll bet you they're not far off. I must say, Hector, you don't seem particularly anxious to get hold of them. Are there any of them friends of yours?"

Hector did not answer this taunt. He merely said—

"It is a dark night, sir, to make any one out."

And then they went on again, but with caution; for besides the danger of breaking a leg among the rocks, they knew that the yawning gulfs of the sea were by their side. Hector led the way, Fred Stanley coming next, Meredyth—with muttered grumblings—bringing up the rear. In this wise they followed the inward bend of the bay, until the keeper leapt from the rocks into a drifted mass of seaweed: they were at the corner of the semi-circular beach.

Suddenly Fred Stanley caught Hector's arm, and held him for a second.

"Do you hear that?" he said, in an eager whisper. "They are there—right ahead of us—fire a shot at them, Hector!—give them a peppering—give their coats a dusting!"

"Oh, no, sir," said the serious-mannered keeper, "I cannot do that. But I will go forward and challenge them. When you get to know who they are, then you will apply for a summons afterwards."

"Come on, then!—come along!" the young man said, and he began to run—stumbling over seaweed, stones, and shingle—but guided by the subdued commotion in front of him.

All at once that scuffle ceased. There was another sound—slight and yet distinct: it was the hurried dip of oars. Nay, was not that the "loom" of a boat, not twenty yards away from them—the dark hull receding from the land?

"Here, Hector!" the young man cried—furious that his prey had just escaped him. "Fire, man!—give them a charge!—give the thieving scoundrels a dose of shot amongst them!"

Hector made no answer to this appeal. He called aloud—

"Who are you? Whose is that boat?"

There was no word in reply—only the slight sound of the dipping oars. Fred Stanley caught at the gun; but the keeper held it away from him.

"No, sir, no," he said gravely. "We must keep within the law, whatever they do."

"Yes—and now they're off—and laughing at us!" the young man angrily exclaimed. And then he said: "Do you mean to tell me you don't know who these men are? Do you mean to tell me you don't know quite well that it is Ross of Heimra who is in that boat?"

"I am not thinking that, sir," Hector answered slowly.

"You took precious good care not to find out!" Fred Stanley said, for he was grievously disappointed. "If you had come up with me you might have com-

pelled them to stop and declare themselves: even if you had fired in the air, that would have brought them to reason fast enough. When shall we get such another chance? I knew things like this were going on—knew it quite well. And it's your place to stop it—it's your business. It is a monstrous thing that the fishing in the rivers should be destroyed by those thieves."

He continued looking out to sea; but the boat had disappeared in the dark.

"No, we shall not get another chance like that," said he, turning to his friend Meredyth. "And it is a thousand pities—for I would have given anything to have caught that fellow red-handed: I hate to think of my sister being imposed upon."

"Well, I suppose we'd better be getting back," said Frank Meredyth, who had displayed no great interest in this expedition. "And I dare say Hector can show us some inland way—I don't want to go round those infernal rocks again."

"Hector?" said Fred Stanley, in a savage undertone, "I'm pretty sure of this—that when Hector took us all round those rocks, he knew precious well where the scringers were!"

And very indignant was he, and sullenly resentful, when he carried this story home to Lochgarra House and to his sister. He roundly accused the keepers of connivance. They could put down the scringeing if they chose; but it was all part and parcel of the poaching system that existed for the benefit of Donald Ross. He it was who had the fishing and shooting of this estate. A fine condition of affairs, truly!

"I am afraid," said Mary Stanley, who seemed to take this stormy complaint with much composure, "that Mr. Ross has not quite enough skill to make much of a poacher, even if he were inclined that way. If you had been here yesterday, you would have heard himself say that he was a very indifferent shot, and a very poor fisherman also——"

"And you believed him, of course!" her brother said, with contempt. "Of course he would say that! That is the very thing he would profess——"

"But, you see, Fred," she continued, without taking any offence, "he gave us a very good reason why he should be but a poor sportsman. There is neither fishing nor shooting on Heimra Island."

He laughed scornfully.

"Fishing and shooting on Heimra Island?" he repeated. "What need has he of them, when he has the fishing and shooting of Lochgarra?"

"You may be mistaken, Fred," Frank Meredyth interposed—careful to be on Miss Stanley's side, as usual. "You may be going too much by what Purdie said that evening at Inverness. At the same time, I quite know this, that when once you suspect any one of poaching, it is desperately difficult to get the idea out of your head. All kinds of small things are constantly happening that seem to offer confirmation——"

"I will bet you twenty pounds to five shillings," said the young man hotly, "that if we go out to Heimra to-morrow, and stay to luncheon, we shall find sea-trout on the table. There may be no fishing on the island—that is quite possible; but I tell you there will be sea-trout in Ross's house. I dare you all to put it to the proof. It is a fair offer. We can run out in the steam-launch if the sea is as calm as it is now—Mamie, you can come too, and Miss Glendinning; and my bet is twenty pounds to five shillings that you will find sea-trout produced."

"Surely it would be rather shabby to go and ask a man to give you lunch in order to prove something against him?" she made answer. "And even then that would not show he had been himself in the boat. As for any of the people about here using a scringe-net now and again to pick up a few fish—well, that is not a very heinous offence."

"If it is," said Meredyth (still siding with her), "it is committed every summer by a large number of highly respectable persons. Why, only the other day the Fishery Board had to issue a circular reminding owners of yachts that netting in territorial seas wasn't allowed."

"Oh, very well," said Fred Stanley, with a sort of affected resignation. "Very well. It is no concern of mine. The place does not belong to me. And of course, Mamie, you are only following out the programme which will be laid before the free and independent—the very free and independent—natives of this parish, on Monday. No doubt they will be told they have the right to take salmon and sea-trout wherever they can find them, either in the rivers, or round the mouths of the rivers, or in the sea. *They* have that right, you understand, but *you* haven't; if *you* try to catch a salmon, you will have a stone hurled into the pool in front of you! And what will be the rest of the programme when the English demagogue, and the French anarchist, and the Yankee platform-woman, come to set the heather on fire? How much more are you going to surrender, Mamie? You've cut down the rents everywhere—given up more pasture—given up more peat-land. What next? Don't you think it's an awful shame you should be living in a great big house like this, when those poor people are living in thatched hovels——"

"Well," said Mary, with an honest laugh, "if I must tell you the truth, I do sometimes think so. Sometimes, when I go outside, and look at the contrast, it does seem to me too great——"

"Oh, very well!" he said ironically. "When these are your sentiments, I don't wonder that the place is considered ripe for a general riot. But whatever your theories may be, I'm going to draw the line at personal violence and destruction of property. I shall have my six-chambered Colt loaded on Monday; and if any impudent blackguard dares to come near this place——"

"You are going up the hill on Monday," said she briefly. "Both you and Mr. Meredyth. I want some grouse for the kitchen; and as many more to send away

as you can get for me."

"Pardon me, Miss Stanley," Meredyth said, and he spoke with a certain quiet decision, "you are asking a little too much. It is impossible for us to go away shooting and leave you at the mercy of what may turn out to be a riotous mob. It is quite impossible: you have no right to ask it."

"Yes, but I do ask it!" she said, somewhat petulantly—for she wished to be left free to follow her own designs on that fateful Monday. "You are my guest; you are here for the Twelfth; and I particularly want you—both you and Fred—to go away after the grouse; and never mind about this—this lecture, or whatever it is——"

"I for one, cannot," he said, firmly; "and I know Fred will not."

Mary glanced half-imploringly at Käthchen. But Käthchen sate mute. Perhaps she was considering that, whether Mary went to the meeting or not, it was just as well the two gentlemen were to be within hail. Besides, before then it was just possible Mary might be induced to confess to them her mad resolve: in which case it would become their duty to reason and remonstrate, seeing that Käthchen's protests had been of no avail. Or would they insist on accompanying her to the meeting, if she was determined to go? For one thing, Käthchen did not at all like Fred Stanley's reference to his Colt's revolver; if there was going to be any serious disturbance, that was not likely to prove a satisfactory means of quelling it.

CHAPTER VIII.

A REVOLUTION THAT FAILED.

But at first the two young men—especially when they were in the society of the young women—professed to make light of the threatened invasion. What harm could come of allowing a parcel of notoriety-hunting adventurers to air their eloquence—and their ignorance? The crofters would at once perceive that Ogden, M.P., knew no more about them and their ways of life than he knew about the inhabitants of the moon. As for Mademoiselle Ernestine—the fiery Ernestine would find it difficult to set the Highland peat-bogs in a blaze with her little tin can of paraffin. And as for Mrs. Jackson Noyes of Connecticut—but here the young men had to confess that they knew nothing of Mrs. Jackson Noyes; and so, to amuse themselves, at dinner, they set to work to construct an imaginary

Mrs. Noyes out of a series of guesses.

"She is a passionate sympathiser with all suffering races—especially married women," said Mr. Meredyth, confidently.

"Men are brutes," observed Fred Stanley.

"She will denounce the hideous cruelty of landlords stalking grouse with express rifles," said Meredyth, keeping the ball rolling.

"She will call on the crofters to arise in their wrath and demand that of every stag killed two haunches must be delivered over to them, the remaining two to be retained by the landlord."

"But doesn't that sound reasonable?" said Käthchen, innocently—whereat there was a roar.

"Miss Glendinning," said Meredyth, apologetically, "you forget: the haunches of a stag are limited in number. It was Mrs. Jackson Noyes's idea of a stag we were dealing with. Well, Fred, what next?"

"Any landlord or farmer," continued the younger man, with a matter-of-fact air, "found guilty of killing a sheep without the aid of chloroform to be sent to jail for twenty-five years. No lamb to be taken away from its mother without the mother's consent—in writing, stamped, sealed, and delivered before the Sheriff of Dingwall."

"A compulsory rate," suggested Frank Meredyth, "levied on landlords, of course—for the relief of bed-ridden peat-hags——"

"Oh, stop that nonsense!" Mary interposed, laughing in a shamefaced kind of way. "They can't be as ignorant as all that."

"Oh, can't they?" said he, coolly. "I've seen lots of worse things—accompanied by eloquent, if occasionally ungrammatical, denunciations of the brutal landlords. You are a landlord, Miss Stanley; and you have taken the wages of blood and sin. If I were you I should feel inclined to throw down the thirty pieces of silver and depart and go and hang myself."

"She won't do that," said her brother. "But what she is more likely to do is to give up the pasture of Meall-na-Fearn that those people demand. And then Mrs. Jackson Noyes will telegraph to the *Connecticut Radiator* that a great triumph has been achieved, and that the American banner has begun to wave over the benighted Highlands."

"I wish the American banner didn't wave over so many Highland deer-forests," said Meredyth, briefly; and there an end for the moment.

But the talk of the two young men when they were by themselves was very different.

"What ought to be done, and done at once," said Fred Stanley, "is to send over to Dingwall for a body of police. Indeed, the meeting should be suppressed altogether: it is a clear instigation to riot. I don't see how a riot can be avoided—

if those howlers are allowed to rave. But my sister won't hear of it. Oh, no! Everything is to be amiable and friendly and pleasant. She is quite sure that the crofters are grateful to her for their lowered rents and all that. Grateful!—they don't know what gratitude is!"

"But at all events you must remember this," said Meredyth, "that your sister has been here a much longer time than you; and she has been doing her best to get to understand these people and their wants and their habits of thinking. She may be a little too confident: in that case, it is for you and me to see that she is kept out of harm's way. And as far as I can judge, the main event of the day is to be a raid into Glen Orme forest——"

"By the Lord, they'll get a warm reception if they try that!" young Stanley broke in. "I can tell you, from what I've heard of him, Colonel Tomlins isn't the sort of man to let a lot of vagabonds march past Glen Orme Lodge and take possession of the forest—I should think not. The ragged army will find a sufficient force awaiting them—keepers, foresters, gillies, and the guns of the house-party: there may be driving—but it won't be the deer that will be driven off."

"That as it may be," said Meredyth, with much calmness. "But even if there is a scrimmage up there, what has that got to do with us? I don't care a brass farthing about the Glen Orme deer; I want to see your sister safe. And if the torrent of revolution flows peacefully past this house, and goes to expend itself in Glen Orme—let it, and welcome!"

"Yes, but that is too much to expect," Fred Stanley said, gloomily. "It is my sister who will be preached against by those fanatics. It is she who is the representative here of the landlord interest. Gratitude!—it's precious little gratitude they'll show, when they have this fellow Donald Ross secretly egging them on. Of course, he is annoyed that you and I should have come up to interfere with him; he thought he would only have a woman to deal with; and that the keepers could make all kinds of excuses to her. But now he finds it different. I imagine he knows very well that he is suspected and watched, and that there is a chance of his being caught at any moment—a chance that I mean to make a certainty of before I leave this place!"

"My young friend," said Meredyth, dispassionately, "I'm afraid you are becoming *entêté* about this Donald Ross. And yet I don't wonder at it. I've seen a similar state of affairs, many a time, before now. The fact is, when once you suspect poaching, the suspicion becomes a sort of mania, and all your comfort in the shooting is gone. It is precisely the same on board a yacht. If you once suspect your skipper or your steward of drinking, it's all over with you; you are always looking out—mistrusting—imagining; you may as well go ashore at once, or get another skipper or steward. Of course, the poaching is still more vexatious; for you feel you are being defied and cheated at the same time; and you want re-

venge; and the poacher is generally a devil of a clever fellow. But, after all, Fred, your sister is right: even if you are convinced that there is poaching going on—as there has certainly been some little ill-will shown against us now and then—still, you have nothing to prove that Donald Ross is the culprit—nothing."

"I will catch him yet," said Fred Stanley under his breath.

Next morning being Sunday morning, they all went to church. In going down through the village they could perceive no sign of excitement, anticipatory of the next day: on the contrary, all was decorous quiet. Shutters were shut; in some cases the blinds were drawn down; the few people they saw were dressed in black, and were certainly not breaking the Lord's day by idle or frivolous conversation. But here was John the policeman.

"Well, John," said Mary, to the plump and placid Iain, who smiled good-naturedly when she addressed him, "are we to have civil war to-morrow?"

"Mem?" said John—not understanding.

"Is there going to be a riot to-morrow?" she repeated.

"Aw, no, mem," said John, in a mildly deprecating way. "I am not thinking that. The meeting it will be in the church, and there is the Minister."

"And what are you going to do?" said she. "I suppose you know they threaten to drive the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn, and there is a proposal to go into Glen Orme forest. Well, what are you going to do?"

"I am not sure," said Iain, with a vague, propitiatory grin.

"You have taken no steps to preserve the peace, then?" she demanded—but, indeed, she was well aware of John's comfortable, easy-going optimism.

"Aw, well," said the round-cheeked representative of the law, "mebbe the lads will no do anything at ahl; and if they go into the forest, mebbe they will no do mich harm."

"But I suppose you have heard that Colonel Tomlins's keepers and foresters mean to stop them, if they should attempt any such thing; and it isn't at all likely that Mr. Watson's shepherds will let them drive the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn without some kind of resistance. What then? What are you going to do?"

"Aw, well," said John—letting his eyes rove aimlessly away towards Heimra Island, and then to the little white Free Church beyond the bay, and then back to the ground in front of Miss Stanley's feet, "mebbe there will be no mich harm; and the Minister will be in charge whatever——"

"Look here, John," Fred Stanley broke in, peremptorily, "it is quite clear to me that you mean to stand by and let anything happen that is likely to happen. Very well, I wish to give you notice—and I wish the people about here to understand—that if there's any demonstration made against Lochgarra House, we've got a gun or two there—half a dozen of them—and we don't mean to stand any nonsense."

"Fred!" said she, and she drew her head up: he was put to silence in a moment. Then she turned to the phlegmatic Iain. "You must do what you can to give good advice to any of the young men you may hear talking. These strangers that are coming—what do they know about Lochgarra? They only wish to stir up strife, for their own purposes. And it would be a very bad thing for any of the men about here to be sent for trial to Edinburgh, merely because these strangers were bent on making mischief.

"Yes, mem," answered Iain, obediently—but in a vague way: perhaps he did not quite comprehend.

"John," said Fred Stanley, coming to the front again, "do you know anything about the scringeing that goes on about here?"

This time John did understand.

"Me, sir?" he replied—as if such a question were an insult to the dignity of his office. And perhaps he would have gone on to protest as earnestly as his good-humoured laziness would allow, that he had no knowledge of any such illegal practices, but that Mary Stanley intervened, and carried her party off with her to church.

Of course it was the English portion of the day's services that they attended, in the little, plain, ill-ventilated building. The sermon was so severely doctrinal that they could not follow it very well; while the occasional appeals to the heart, uttered in that high falsetto sing-song, fell with a somewhat unnatural note on the ear. Yet the small congregation listened devoutly—with an occasional sigh. Mary Stanley's attention was not occupied much with the pulpit: she was looking rather at the sad, withered, weather-worn faces of certain of the older people—and thinking what their lot in life had been. She recalled a saying she had heard somewhere in the Black Forest—"The world grows every day harder for us poor folk that are so old;" and she was wondering when her modest, but at least assiduous and sincere, efforts to somewhat better their condition and introduce a measure of cheerfulness into their surroundings would be accepted with a little goodwill. As for the middle-aged and younger men, she was less concerned about them. If they meant to break the windows of Lochgarra House next day, or pillage the garden, or set fire to the kennels, she would stand by and let them do their worst. But she did not think she had deserved such treatment at their hands. When they came out of church again Miss Stanley and her friends lingered awhile, for she wished to intercept the Minister; and eventually Mr. Pettigrew made his appearance. As he approached them, Mr. Pettigrew's gaunt and grey-hued face wore a certain look of apprehension, and he was nervously stroking his long and straggling beard. But Mary received him pleasantly enough.

"How do you do, Mr. Pettigrew?" said she. "I thought I should like to know whether you are going to the gathering to-morrow. If these placards that are

scattered about mean anything, it may be necessary for someone who is well acquainted with the people to be present to speak a quieting word; and as you have lent the church for the purposes of the meeting, I suppose you accept a certain responsibility——"

"Oh, no, Miss Stanley, I would not say that," the Minister responded, rather anxiously, "I would not say that. I think it is a wise thing and a just thing that the people should have an opportunity of conferring one with another about their temporal interests; but it is not for me to be a partisan. I would fain see all men's minds contented as regards their worldly affairs, so that they might the more readily turn to their spiritual requirements and needs. Ay. It is hardly for me to give counsel—either the counsel of Ahitophel or the counsel of Hushai the Archite—"

"And so," said Käthchen, striking in (for she had not yet had a chance of opening her mind to Mr. Pettigrew), "you invite these strangers to come here and stir up contention and mischief—you give them your pulpit to preach from—and then you step aside, and wash your hands of all responsibility! I should have thought a minister of the gospel would have been on the side of peace, not on the side of disturbance and riot——"

"Dear me—dear me—it is all a mistake!" the bewildered Minister exclaimed. "I assure ye it is all a mistake. I did not invite them—Mr. Fraser wrote to me—and I thought I was justified in giving them permission—so that all men's minds might be leeberated. Is not that on the side of peace? Let the truth be spoken, though the heavens fall!—it's a noble axiom—a noble axiom. If the message that these people bring with them have not the truth in it, it will perish; if it have the truth in it, it will endure——"

"Yes, that's all very well," said the intrepid Käthchen. "But in the meantime? What's going to happen in the meantime? And if there is a general riot to-morrow, and property destroyed, and people injured—the truth of the message won't mend that. And what do those people know about Lochgarra? How can they know anything? They are coming here merely to incite a lot of ignorant crofters and cottars to break the law; and you lend them your pulpit, so that the people about here will think the church is on their side, even if they should take it into their heads to set fire to Lochgarra House!"

"Dear me!" said the Minister—who had not expected any such attack from this amiable and rather nice-looking young lady, "I hope nothing of the kind will happen."

"At all events, Mr. Pettigrew," said Mary, interposing, "I understand you don't mean to be present at this meeting? You will let those strangers talk whatever inflammatory stuff they choose without any word of protest or caution. Well, I suppose you have the right to decide for yourself. But I mean to go. If

they have anything to say against me, I want to hear it. If I have no one to defend me, I must defend myself——"

"Oh, but I beg your pardon, Miss Stanley!" Frank Meredyth broke in. "You are not quite so defenceless—not at all! For my own part, I don't think you ought to go to this meeting—I think it will be unwise and uncalled for; but if you do go, you sha'n't go alone—I will see to that."

And again, after they had left the Minister, and were on their way back to Lochgarra House, he urgently begged her to abandon this enterprise; and her brother joined in, and quite as warmly.

"Why, you are the very person they have come to denounce!" Fred Stanley exclaimed. "You are the representative of the landlords. And what will they think of your appearing at the meeting? They will take it as an open challenge!"

"I mean it as an open challenge," she said, proudly. "I want to know what I am accused of. I want to ask what more I could have done—with my limited means. For of course my means are limited. I can't build breakwaters, and buy fleets of fishing-boats, and make railways; for I haven't the money. And I can't change the soil, or alter the climate, or even alter the habits of the people."

"What did I tell you, Mamie, at Invershin Station?" said Käthchen; but Mary Stanley went on unheeding—

"If there are grievances still to be redressed, I want to hear of them."

"Their real grievance is that they haven't got the land for nothing," observed her brother, who had a short and summary way of dealing with such questions.

"Well, if you must go, at least we can promise you a body-guard," said Frank Meredyth, as they were ascending the wide stone steps. "At the same time, I think you would be very much better advised to stay at home."

That afternoon the ordinary dull somnolence of a Lochgarra Sunday gave way to a quite unusual, if subdued, excitement. To begin with, about half-past three a waggonette came rattling into the silent little village, and drew up at the inn; while its occupants—the three apostles of Land Liberation—descended and disappeared from view. They were not gone long, however. The cottagers, furtively peeping from behind door or window-blind, beheld the strangers come out again and set off for a walk along the sea-front, scanning every object on each hand of them as they passed. The central figure of the three was a large and heavily-built man, pale and flabby of face, with small, piggish, twinkling eyes, close-cropped and stubbly yellow hair, and a wide but thin-lipped and resolute mouth. He wore a loose-flapping frock-coat, and a black felt wideawake; his hands were clasped behind him; he waddled as he walked. On his right was a tall and elderly woman, spare, and rather elegant of figure; with a thin, sharp face which, either from constitutional acridity of blood or perhaps from driving in the sun, was distinctly violent in colour: this was Ernestine—the fiery Ernestine—

who had no doubt brought with her her torch and can of paraffin. As for the lady who had come all the way across the Atlantic to enlighten these poor souls of crofters, no one could say what she was like; for she was entirely enveloped in a brown dust-coat and a blue veil. But she was shorter than either of her companions.

"There are only three of them—there ought to be four," said Frank Meredyth, as the Lochgarra House party were regarding these passing strangers from the drawing-room window. "The big man is Ogden—he is easily recognisable—I'm afraid he has puffed himself out with too much tea-drinking; but where is the Highland Land Leaguer?"

"Why, you don't suppose the vice-president of a branch of the Highland Land League would travel on a Sunday?" said Käthchen. "He will be coming along to-morrow morning,—even if he has to walk or drive all night."

Mary was also regarding the strangers.

"If the American woman, whichever she is," said she, quietly, "is going to denounce me to-morrow, she has not left herself much time to get information about this place. She will have to begin at once, if she wishes to ascertain the facts."

"The facts!" said Meredyth. "She won't have to search about for them. She has brought them with her—from Connecticut."

Truly this was an afternoon of surprises. For while on a rare occasion it might happen that someone arrived at Lochgarra on Sunday by road, it was almost an unheard-of thing that anyone should come in by sea. Boating of any description was quite unknown on the sacred day; there was no ferry—no Queen's highway to be kept open; while as for going on the water for pleasure, such sacrilege never entered the brain of a native of Lochgarra. And yet here, unmistakeably, was a small black-hulled lugger, with a ruddy brown sail, coming steadily in before the light westerly breeze; and when, having at length gained the shelter of the quay, she was rounded into the wind, and yard and sail lowered, her occupants presently got into the little dinghey astern, and came ashore. From the drawing-room of Lochgarra House they were easily distinguishable: they were Big Archie, Donald Ross of Heimra, and the young lad who was usually in charge of the lugger. When they landed, young Ross left his companions, and went directly up to the inn.

"Ha! didn't I tell you?" Fred Stanley cried, with an air of triumph. "Before the storm the petrel!—I thought we should see him somewhere about, when this affair was coming off. Only, he has missed his confederates. I wonder if they have gone far. I suppose Mr. Ogden has taken his American friend up Minard way to show her what a crofter's cottage is like—or perhaps she wants to look at the bed-ridden peat-hags. We shall find Ross following them in a moment—only

he won't know which way they have gone." Of a sudden he rose from his seat, as if struck by some new idea. "I've a great mind to go down to the inn. What do you say, Frank? I should like to step up to him and tell him that he'll find his friends if he goes up the Minard road."

"You shall do nothing of the kind!" said Mary, angrily.

"I should like to see the expression of his face!" her brother observed.

"If they are friends of Mr. Ross, he can find them for himself," said she. "It is none of our business. And—and—if they are not—I won't have him insulted by anyone going from this house!"

He looked at her: she did not often talk in this indignant and vehement way.

"Oh, very well," he said. "Very well. It doesn't matter to me. You may have cause to change your opinion to-morrow."

All that evening very little mention was made of the subject about which everyone was secretly thinking. Frank Meredyth, finding it was of no use to try to move Mary from her purpose, thought the best thing he could do was to reassure her: he said he hoped Ernestine would prove amusing. And next morning, too, he professed to treat the whole affair as a jest; but all the same he kept going to the window from time to time, to have a look at the little groups of twos and threes who were congregated here and there, talking amongst themselves. For there was clearly some small commotion prevailing; the people were not attending to their ordinary affairs; the most trifling occurrence—a dog-fight in the street—attracted all eyes.

Mary insisted on setting out early; she wished everyone to see that she was going to attend the meeting. And hardly had they left the house—they were going round by the end of the quay—when Fred Stanley said in an undertone to his neighbour Meredyth—

"I don't know what's going to happen; but if they try on any games, I've got a little friend in my pocket here that can bark—and bite."

Mary overheard, and turned on him at once.

"What is that?" said she. "Your revolver? Let me see it."

He looked round: there was no one by.

"Oh, it is an elegant little companion to have with you," he said, bringing forth the silver-mounted weapon from his pocket, and regarding it quite affectionately.

She took it from him—he thinking that she merely wished to look at it—and, without more ado, she pitched it over the low sea-wall: there was a splash in the clear green water, and a bubble or two of air.

"Things of that sort are not fit for children," she said—and she took no heed of the angry flush that at once rose to his forehead: anger more probably caused

by the reference to his youth than to the loss of his revolver. However, he said nothing; and so they went on again; and eventually arrived at the church.

When they entered the little building and modestly took their places in the nearest of the pews, there ensued a rather awkward moment; for they had come early; and, on looking round, they found that the only other persons present were they who had summoned the meeting; so that the hostile camps had a good opportunity of contemplating each other. The pulpit (like the body of the church) was empty; but in the precentor's box was a serious-visaged, brown-bearded man, who was no doubt Mr. Fraser, of the Stratherrick Branch of the Highland Land League; while underneath him, in the square space partitioned off for the pews of the elders, sate the three persons who were to address the meeting. They were all gravely silent, as was fit and proper; but their eyes were alert; and it was as clear as daylight to Mary's friends that the strangers had recognised in her the lady of Lochgarra House, whom they had come to impeach as the representative in these parts of the iniquitous landlord interest. It was indeed an awkward moment; and Mr. Ogden's glances of scrutiny were furtive, until he turned away altogether; but the thin and feverish-faced Mlle. Ernestine took more confident survey; and her bold black eyes went from one to the other of the group, but were most frequently fixed on Mary Stanley. The lady from Connecticut, also, was obviously curious: most probably she had never beheld before any of those people whose malevolent turpitude had brought the Highlands to such a pass.

The time went slowly by, in this constrained silence. The vice-president of the Stratherrick Branch, from his seat in the precentor's box, began to look rather anxiously towards the door. Mr. Ogden glanced at his watch. Frank Meredyth did likewise—it was ten minutes after one. And yet there had been no sign of any human being—except for a small boy who had thrust his shock head in for a second, and gazed wonderingly around the empty church, and then withdrawn with a scared face. At length the chairman leaned over the edge of the precentor's box, and in an audible whisper said—

"Mr. Ogden, I'm thinking ye'd better go out and tell them?"

Mr. Ogden hesitated for a moment, and then made answer—

"Don't you think we should begin the proceedings?—that will be the best announcement."

"Very well," said Mr. Fraser; and he rose in his place with a heavy sigh of preparation. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "before coming to local matters, I will ask Mrs. Jackson Noyes to read a paper that she has prepared. Mrs. Noyes has recently completed a two days' trip round the West Highlands in the steamer *Dunara Castle*; and where she has been unable to land—for the steamer does not give ye much time at any place—she has used her eyes, or her opera-glass, impartially; and what she has seen she has put down. The title of the paper is;

'*The Horrible Desolation of the Highlands, as Descried from the Deck of the Dunara.*' Would ye get up on the bench, mem?"

This last murmured invitation was addressed to Mrs. Noyes, who rose to her feet, but seemed to shrink from taking up any more prominent position. Indeed, the poor woman looked dreadfully embarrassed; her face was all aflame; instead of proceeding with her paper, she kept glancing helplessly towards the door, whither Mr. Ogden had gone to reconnoitre; and it was clear she could not bring herself to begin without an audience, or, rather, with that small audience that was a hundred times worse than none. And presently Mr. Ogden came back—his face black as thunder. He went up to the precentor's box, and muttered something to the chairman. He returned to the elders' enclosure, and said something to the two ladies—who seemed entirely bewildered. The next moment the four of them had filed out of the church, without a word.

"Well, this is the most astounding thing!" Frank Meredyth exclaimed, when his party had also left their places, and got into the open air. "What is the matter with the people? Not a living soul has come near the place! No wonder the big Parliament-man was in a furious rage!"

But Mary had turned to Kate Glendinning, who had fallen a step or two behind.

"Käthchen," she said, in an undertone, "what is the meaning of all this? I can see perfectly well you know something about it."

For indeed Käthchen was all tremblingly triumphant, and joyous, and also inclined to tears—half-hysterical, in short.

"Mamie—Mamie," she said, between that laughing and crying, "I knew he could do it if he liked—and—and—I thought he would—for your sake—"

"What are you talking about?" said Mary: but a sudden self-conscious look showed that she had guessed.

"You needn't be angry, Mamie," said Käthchen, her wet eyes shining with a half-concealed pride and delight; "but—but I was terribly frightened about what might happen to you; and yesterday I sent Big Archie out to Heimra—I told him to go as soon as the people had got into church—and I gave him a note. For I knew he would answer the message at once—and that he would see you came to no harm—"

"Do you mean Donald Ross?" said Mary, rather breathlessly.

"Who else could have done it?" said Käthchen, with something of reproach. "And I knew he would do that—or anything—for your sake. Oh, do you think I can't see?—do you think I have no eyes?"

Mary did not answer: she walked on in silence for a little while. But by and by she said—

"Käthchen, don't you think I ought to see Mr. Ross—before he goes back to

Heimra?”

END OF VOL. II.

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